

# **POTENTIAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HARMFUL SUPERVISION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

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*For the glory of the King*

## DECLARATION

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## SUMMARY

Supervision of social workers in South Africa is mandatory, as determined by the Supervision Framework for the Social Work Profession in South Africa. However, it is questionable whether frontline social workers are experiencing supervision practices as helpful. Recent international and local research reports indicate that in many instances supervision is not fulfilling its intended functions and goal, leaving supervisees vulnerable to inadequate and even harmful supervision.

Harmful supervision may be defined as supervisory practices that result in psychological, emotional and/or physical harm or trauma to the supervisee, owing to factors such as the supervisor's disinterest and lack of investment in supervision, power relations, generational and cultural differences and lack of resources. This research reports on potentially harmful supervision practices based on experiences of frontline social workers in a variety of social welfare organisations in the Western Cape, South Africa. Certain findings generated from a purposive, qualitative and exploratory study by means of individual interviews with 20 social workers suggest that supervision may often become a mere "box-ticking exercise", is crisis driven and "on the run", and is frequently reduced to little more than compliance checking. Some of these participants experience minimum support and consequently feel at risk and vulnerable.

This research document contains two literature chapters. The first explores the current literature on supervision and its intended purposes and functions in order to generate a clear framework of what supervision is supposed to entail. The second extrapolates potentially harmful supervision practises drawing on work from other fields of expertise. Chapter four comprises the empirical study, where data was collected from participants and presented in an integrated manner detailing the specific potential factors contributing to harmful supervision. In chapter five, concrete recommendations are posed to supervisors, managers of organisations and policymakers to curb these potentially harmful supervision practices.

The main conclusions drawn from these findings established that harmful supervision practise is indeed occurring and that supervision is no longer reaching its intended functions. This is due to the fact that the checks and balances in place are falling away, as they are being used merely as a formality. If supervision was returned to its all-encompassing purpose, supervisors and supervisees alike would reap the benefits of its practise. While time constraints and lack

of training for supervisors are valid points as to why supervision is not happening correctly, this is not an excuse for this type of malpractice, which should be treated as a serious offence. Supervision is crucial for the benefit of practitioners, but if not carried out correctly is causing more harm than good.

## OPSOMMING

Supervisie van maatskaplike werkers in Suid-Afrika is verpligtend, soos bepaal deur die Supervisieraamwerk van die Suid-Afrikaanse Raad vir Maatskaplike Diensprofessies. Dit kan egter bevraagteken word of maatskaplike werkers supervisie sonder meer as nuttig ervaar. Onlangse internasionale en plaaslike navorsingsverslae dui daarop dat supervisie in baie gevalle nie die beoogde funksies en doelstellings vervul nie, en dat werkers kwesbaar is as gevolg van onvoldoende en selfs skadelike supervisie.

Skadelike supervisie kan gedefinieer word as supervisie wat lei tot sielkundige, emosionele en/of liggaamlike skade of trauma, as gevolg van faktore soos die gebrekkige belangstelling deur die supervisor, ongelyke magsverhoudinge, en generasie en kulturele verskille, sowel as 'n gebrek aan hulpbronne. Hierdie navorsing doen verslag oor potensieel skadelike supervisiepraktyke, gebaseer op ervarings van maatskaplike werkers in 'n verskeidenheid maatskaplike welsynsorganisasies in die Wes-Kaap, Suid-Afrika. Bevindinge wat gegenereer is uit 'n doelbewuste, kwalitatiewe, verkennende studie deur middel van individuele onderhoude met 20 maatskaplike werkers dui daarop dat supervisie in baie gevalle bloot 'n afmerk van take is, krisisgedrewe is en informeel is. Supervisie vervul in baie gevalle bloot 'n kontrolefunksie. Sommige deelnemers aan hierdie navorsing ervaar minimum ondersteuning en beleef dat hulle kwesbaar is.

Hierdie navorsing bevat twee literatuur-hoofstukke. Die eerste hoofstuk verken die funksies van supervisie, ten einde 'n duidelike raamwerk te stel van wat supervisie veronderstel is om te wees. Die tweede hoofstuk ondersoek potensieel skadelike supervisiepraktyke. Hoofstuk vier van hierdie studie fokus op die empiriese studie waar deelnemers se ervaring van skadelike supervisie ondersoek word. In hoofstuk vyf word konkrete aanbevelings aan supervisors, bestuurders van organisasies en beleidmakers gemaak om potensieel skadelike in supervisiepraktyke te verminder.

Gevolgtrekkings dui daarop dat skadelike supervisiepraktyke wel geredelik plaasvind en dat supervisie soms nie die beoogde funksies bereik nie, omdat dit as 'n blote 'n formaliteit gebruik word. Terwyl tydsbeperkings en 'n gebrek aan opleiding vir supervisors geldige argumente is waarom supervisie nie funksioneel is nie, is dit nie 'n verskoning vir wanpraktyke in supervisie nie, wat as 'n ernstige oortreding beskou kan word. Supervisie is belangrik vir praktisyns in maatskaplike werk, maar as dit nie korrek gedoen word nie, kan dit potensieel meer skade doen.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 PRELIMINARY STUDY AND RATIONALE

Attention to clinical supervision processes and supervisor training has increased globally in recent years (Borders, 2014). However, the volume of research in South African social work is by no means abreast with the conceptual material published on this topic, with little agreement regarding what good and effective supervision entails (Davys, 2010). The void in literature leaves serious theoretical and practical problems, as the consensus amongst researchers is that supervision is required for quality service delivery, retention of social workers, confrontation of ethical issues, caseload management, job satisfaction, and professional learning and development (Bogo & McKnight, 2006; Davys, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2010; Tsui & Ho, 1998; Voicu, 2017).

Social service professionals are employed to assist and support clients in their respective field of expertise, whether it be medical, educational, psychological or in social work (Voicu, 2017). In this capacity, social workers specifically are accountable to ensure that effective services are being rendered (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). This is made possible through supervision if facilitated in an ethical and competent manner; competence being the ability to interact effectively within the social work environment, as extrapolated by Guttman, Eisikovits and Maluccio (1988) and Parker (2017).

Supervision shapes practitioners and cultivates a learning environment for supervisees to acquire skills through first-hand experience (Falander & Shafranske, 2010). Supervisors are thus the gatekeepers of the profession, leaving supervisees and clients vulnerable to poor supervision (Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman & Kangos, 2017). Poor supervision practises extend beyond being a poor reflection on the supervisor alone, as they also have harmful effects on those under his or her guidance and on the welfare of their clients (Han, Harms & Bai, 2017). Present literature (Barker, 1995; Barker & Munson, 2002; Beddoe, 2017; Ellis, Ladany, Krenzel & Schult, 1996; Falander & Shafranske, 2010; Falander, Shafranske & Ofek 2014; Milicenco, 2013; Ginilka, Chang & Dew, 2012; Kilminster & Jolly, 2000) elucidates that the ultimate purpose of supervision, whether stated or implied, is to render effective services to clients, ensure their social wellbeing and develop their capacity by enhancing their knowledge,

skills and greater self-awareness through competent service rendering, as developed in supervision.

However, supervision is not always effective. A plethora of researchers suggest that supervision of social workers may also be harmful (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017; Beddoe, 2017; Ellis, Creaner, Hutman & Timulak, 2015; Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman & Kangos, 2017; McNamara, Kangos, Corp & Ellis, 2017; Reiser & Milne, 2017). In order to comprehend harmful supervision, it is essential to first conceptualise what supervision is.

Supervision can be defined for all professions and in several ways at different times (Barker, 1995). For the purpose of this study, supervision is defined through the social work profession as a foundation and complimented with definitions from professions such as psychology. The Supervision Framework for social work in South Africa views social work supervision as “an interactional and interminable process within the context of a positive, anti-discriminatory relationship, based on distinct theories, models and perspectives on supervision, whereby a social worker supervisor supervises a social work practitioner by performing educational, supportive and administrative functions in order to promote efficient and professional rendering of social work services” (DSD & SACSSP, 2012:10). Although each profession has its own corpus of knowledge and skills, supervision of health and human services has practises common to all (Beddoe, 2017). Whilst South Africa utilises the Supervision Framework for social work in South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012), the American Psychological Association (2015) clarifies that the supervisor’s role is to serve as a role model to the supervisee and to fulfil the highest duty of protecting the public and ensuring that supervisees are competent to practise.

These definitions from different professions form the theoretical underpinning of what supervision of service professionals should entail. However, research shows that social workers have shifted the primary task of the supervisory relationship to administrative needs as opposed to the practise needs of social workers (Hair, 2013). The emphasis is therefore focused on deadlines and administrative responsibility, which may cause supervision to be problem centred (Cohen, 1999) rather than focusing on the triad of supervision functions, as expounded by Kadushin (1976), namely: education, support and administration. Thus, the question can be asked: Are supervisors equipped to fulfil the functions of supervision, in line with the definition of social work supervision? Or, is there inadequacy in training and other potential factors that lead to derisory practise of supervision (Beddoe, 2017)? Regardless, the lack of efficient

supervision increases the stress and turnover rates of social workers, as well as decreases job satisfaction and the quality of care (Tebes, Matlin, Migdol, Farkas, Money, Schulman & Hoge, 2011). Whilst it is clear that supervision does serve a significant function in social work, it is evident that the quality of supervision may not always be sufficient for rendering effective services.

For the purpose of this study, harmful supervision is defined as any combination of supervisory practices which result in psychological, emotional and/or physical harm or trauma to the supervisee, including intentional and unintentional harm (Ellis et al., 2014:7). Although Beddoe (2017) also contributes to theories on harmful social work supervision, she too draws on the work of Ellis et al. (2014), but pays additional attention to the behaviour of harmful supervision, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, micro aggressions and supervisory neglect. It is therefore clear that harmful supervision is a reality in the social service profession, however, social work in particular has not yet explored the practise, potential factors and consequences of harmful supervision.

Social workers in South Africa are mandated to fulfil the functions of supervision by means of the Supervision Framework for the Social Work Profession in South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). The question that needs to be asked though is this: is supervision necessary if its practise is ineffective and harmful? With various supervision policies and frameworks outlining legislative requirements, practise standards, competencies and ethical conduct of supervision, how is harmful supervision still unnoticed in South Africa? In the USA, harmful supervision leads to various consequences including the exhaustion of social and psychological resources (Han, Harms & Bai, 2017). In Ireland, Ellis et al. (2017) noted that 52% of Irish supervisees were classified as receiving harmful supervision, whilst 77% of Irish supervisees had received harmful supervision at some point. However, in South Africa, Engelbrecht (2013) identified poor supervisory training, lack of leadership skills and structural supervision issues as challenges to supervision, but failed to link these challenges to the practise of harmful supervision and the consequences which might arise. It is therefore clear that supervision is imperative to the profession, but the lack of concrete literature makes harmful supervision unidentifiable in practise and thus a problem in South Africa.

Despite the mandate to do no harm (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017), harmful supervision appears to be occurring more frequently in unacknowledged ways in various professions. In a business context, harmful supervision can be identified as public criticism, inconsiderate actions,



sustained forms of hostility, lack of diversity, lack of multiculturalism in the work place and raising one's voice to achieve greater task performance (Trepper, 2000). However, in clinical psychology harmful supervision is identified as a lack of recognition of the importance of power, privilege and cultural differences, poor supervisory boundaries, unresolved and unrecognised difficulties in the supervisory alliance, lack of consistent formative feedback and inconsistent documentation of problems in supervision (Reiser & Milne, 2017). While there is a lack of literature on harmful supervision in social work, other professions such as business and psychology (Reiser & Milne, 2017; Trepper, 2000) lay the foundation for exploring this detrimental form of supervision in social work along with its potential contributing factors and consequences.

Han, Harms and Bai (2017) suggest that when supervision is insufficient and harmful, it is imperative to identify the potential factors that contribute to this malpractice. These factors may be solely ascribed to, or be a combination of potential factors including: leadership beliefs, power relations, resources, gender (Shen-miller, Forrest & Burt, 2012), structural or organisational issues (Engelbrecht, 2019a), cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001), gender differences and inequality, generational dimensions (MacManus & Turner, 2018; Strauss & Howe, 1991), diversity issues, adult education principles in supervision (Knowles, 1971), learning styles and educational strategies (Kolb, 1973), power games (Tsui, 2005), job stability, ethical issues, personality and emotional intelligence flaws (Han, Harms & Bai, 2017).

In sum, harmful supervision has been identified in various professions and in several countries. However, very little is known about harmful social work supervision in South Africa. This study provides a platform to understand harmful supervision, the potential factors which contribute to this and the dysfunctional consequences in order for supervision to fulfil its intended function in social work.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In South Africa, social work supervisors are mandated by the Supervision Framework for the Social Work Profession in South Africa to render supervision services that promote and protect the interests of beneficiaries, promote the active recognition of cultural systems, promote professional development, promote accountability to acceptable practise and to respect the inherent dignity and worth of every person (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). This framework forms the foundation for the best practise of supervision, which is imperative to social work as the profession is unpredictable, non-routine, non-standardised, highly individualised and

imperceptible in nature (Botha, 2002). However, there is a growing concern in South Africa that supervision is falling short of this standard and has transformed into “on the run” supervision, as supervisors are too busy with various management tasks (Engelbrecht, 2013; Noble & Irwin, 2009) and its application is either faulty or weak (Botha, 2002). Kudushin and Harkness (2002) explain that supervision as described in frameworks exists nowhere in practice. That being said, there is no theoretical link as yet to these factors and the practice of harmful supervision in social work supervision in South Africa.

In line with this, various other professions and countries have expressed concerns about the diminishing availability and quality of supervision (Hair, 2013). Specifically, factors such as inadequacy and lack of training (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017), rigid supervision practises, and poor diversity and multiculturalism within supervision (Beddoe, 2017) have been linked to harmful supervision practises. Engelbrecht (2013 & 2014) has noted similar harmful factors, however, there has been no direct tie to these factors being potentially harmful to supervision within the South African context. A central aspect of this research is therefore to identify potential factors that may contribute to harmful supervision within South African social work. By identifying these factors, research can answer why the current policies are falling short and recommend how to rectify this unethical practise. Being educated on these issues and factors specifically will enable educators and supervisors to be more competent in practise in order to provide efficient services to service users.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

Based on the preceding argument that exposes the lack of research and literature on the topic in South Africa, the following research question can be formulated: What are the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision in social work?

### **1.4 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **1.4.1 The goal**

The goal of this research is to identify potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers and to gain an understanding on how these factors contribute towards harmful supervision.

#### **1.4.2 Objectives**

The following objectives have contributed to the goal of the study:

- To construct a conceptual framework for the understanding of supervision and harmful supervision in social work and within a global and local context.
- To identify and describe the potential factors which may contribute to harmful supervision in social work.
- To investigate the perceptions and experiences of social workers about their observations of the factors which are contributing to harmful supervision in social work.
- To make conclusions and recommendations to supervisors and management systems of public and private social work organisations on how to prevent harmful supervision.

## **1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical underpinning of the proposed research is founded on the work of primary authors on supervision. This includes Kudushin (1976) and Botha (1985), who have laid the foundation for the need for supervision in social work internationally and in South Africa. Other pivotal researchers include Munson (2002), Tsui, (1997) and Engelbrecht (2014; 2019a), who have highlighted the significance of supervision in social work.

Specific consideration is placed on cutting-edge literature on harmful supervision, which extrapolates the rising practise of harmful supervision in social service professions and draws on the work of Ammirati and Kaslow (2017), Reiser and Milne (2017), Beddoe (2017), Ellis et al. (2017), McNamara et al. (2017) and Ellis, Creaner, Hutman and Timulak (2015).

## **1.6 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS**

For the purpose of this study, key concepts including social work supervision and harmful supervision were defined in the rationale and will be defined extensively in chapters two and three of this study.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The following section describes the research approach adopted, the literature study, the research design, sample, ethical clearance, the method of data collection and data analysis. This section also includes the steps followed with regard to the presentation of the research.

### **1.7.1 Literature study**

At the outset of the research, the researcher conducted an extensive literature study on the most current theses, journals, articles and books in order to establish a framework to compare research and lay a foundation for the research to follow. Specific attention was focused on

articles (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017; Beddoe, 2017; Ellis, Creaner, Hutman & Timulak, 2015; Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman & Kangos, 2017; McNamara, Kangos, Corp & Ellis, 2017; Reiser & Milne, 2017) from the *Clinical Supervisor Journal*, which is the premier interdisciplinary journal in the world devoted exclusively to the art and science of clinical supervision. This step is imperative for the researcher in order to display an understanding of the current topic, to build on the work done previously and to ensure that the study does not duplicate another (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005).

### **1.7.2 Research approach**

This study employed a qualitative research approach to obtain detailed information on harmful supervision in order to attain the goals and aims of the study. Qualitative research is predominantly used to answer questions about complex phenomena (Fouché & Delpont, 2011), as it deals with multifaceted frameworks, professionals in practise and the intricate linking of factors to harmful supervision. Qualitative research also seeks to understand the phenomena from the participants' points of view (Fouché & Delpont, 2011). This is coherent with this study, as it seeks to gain an understanding of the social workers' perceptions of harmful supervision. The qualitative approach is also pertinent to this study as it allows for flexibility in all aspects of the research process (Kumar, 2005), which is appropriate when exploring the perception of harmful supervision.

The study was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews, whereby the reality was interpreted from the respondents' frame of reference (Greef, 2011). The study therefore includes a wide variety of data, being a characteristic of qualitative research as defined by Creswell (2007). Furthermore, the researcher utilised a combination of an inductive and a deductive research approach, as explained in Engel and Schutt (2014), moving from theory to empirical data and back again.

### **1.7.3 Research design**

The research objective investigates the perceptions of social workers regarding their observations of the factors contributing to harmful supervision in social work, which has been explored by means of explorative and descriptive research designs. An exploratory research design is frequently used to identify the general terrain of a topic or problem area in the primary stages of research and forms a part of the initial sequence of studies, where the objective is to reach a basic goal within the research (Alson & Bowles, 2003; Fouché & de Vos, 2011). This design is thus appropriate for the relatively new nature of harmful supervision in South Africa,

which may trigger further studies in the field of harmful supervision. Along with an exploratory design, the researcher also utilised a descriptive research design in order to provide specific details on the research. Descriptive research answers questions such as how and why, leading to a more intense examination of the phenomena and an in-depth description of the study (Fouché & de Vos, 2011; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). In so doing, this assisted with achieving the research objectives in chapters two to four, hence the explorative and descriptive research design combination is suited to the research.

#### **1.7.4 Sampling**

For the purpose of this study, snowball sampling was utilised. Carey (2012) suggests that snowball sampling is when a researcher begins with one or two participants and then builds their sample by moving to others who are recommended. This form of sampling is used when a lack of knowledge or information exists about the sampling frame and there is limited access to the appropriate participants for the intended study (Alston & Bowels, 2003). This method was utilised for the study of harmful supervision in South African social work to gain insight on the perceptions of social workers on the potential factors that contribute to harmful supervision.

The above approach is suitable for this study, as the work done specifically on harmful supervision in South African social work is limited and relatively unknown, which makes snowball sampling necessary. This method of sampling has been utilised based on the following criteria for inclusion:

- Social workers with a minimum of a year's experience, in order to ensure that they have had sufficient exposure to social work supervision in practise;
- Employed either by the state or private welfare organisations, as the research is not bound to a specific organisation;
- Must have received any form of supervision in their professional capacity, in order for the perceptions of the social workers to be accurate and relevant to supervision; and
- Be proficient in English, as the interviews were conducted in this language.

The sample of this study comprised 20 participants, all of whom are social workers. This is in line with Carey (2012), who states that small-scale qualitative research can range from four to eighteen participants as a norm, but that the focus should be on the quality of data collection

and not on the quantity. Accordingly, 20 participants allowed for data saturation (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006) in the study.

In order to acquire the sample, the researcher contacted professionals fitting the criteria for inclusion in their personal professional capacity through email and telephone calls. The researcher did not require permission from the organisation where the participants were sourced, as the research focused on the perceptions of individuals and their thoughts around harmful supervision, and not those reflecting a specific organisation. Once the researcher had obtained the first participant, snowball sampling was utilised to request the participant for referrals of additional social workers who also meet the criteria for inclusion. Interviews were conducted at the convenience of each participant, and not at their work place to ensure no disturbance to their jobs. The interviews were supervised by the University of Stellenbosch. All data collection was handled on site and included informed consent from all participants, as provided by the University of Stellenbosch (refer to Annexure 1).

#### **1.7.5 Instruments for data collection**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher employed the semi-structured interview method, whereby the interviews are organised around certain areas of particular interest (Greef, 2011). This method was utilised to gain a detailed picture of the participants' perceptions of harmful supervision (Greef, 2011). Such an approach allows for a more flexible environment between the researcher and the participants, and the freedom to follow avenues of interest to the researcher (Greef, 2011; Kumar, 2005).

This interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions, but excluded the section regarding the participants' biographical information, where a combination of closed-ended questions and multiple choice questions were used. In addition, a voice recorder was used to audio tape the interviews after consent from the participants was obtained. Thereafter, these interviews were transcribed. Field notes were also made during interviews in order to assist the researcher with the analysis thereof.

The flexibility of the semi-structured approach allowed for the researcher to probe in order to acquire rich and meaningful data. Probing was based on conversations constructed around themes and subthemes including biographical information and, more specifically, work experience and gender. Other themes included the perception of harmful supervision, what social workers perceive as harmful supervision and experience in social work practise. Lastly, the theme of factors which influence harmful supervision were discussed (as can be seen in

Annexure 2), including subthemes such as ethics, gender, experience, work environment, organisational culture and so forth, based on the factors identified in the literature study.

### 1.7.6 Data analysis

The data analysis process essentially attempts to better explain and understand research findings by extracting meaning from the data obtained (Carey, 2012). Once the data collection process reached the point of data saturation, the process of data analysis commenced. The first step was to transcribe the recorded data into text format, following which the transcripts were read and the data extracted manually. A denaturalised approach (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005) was used during this process, as the focus is more on the content than on how it was said. In view of this, pauses, stutters, silence, involuntary actions and repetition of words that appear habitual were all removed during transcription. Grammar was corrected where necessary to provide a clearer understanding of the information supplied by the participants. It must be noted that this was carried out with extra caution to avoid changing the meanings and interpretations that the participants gave to their experiences.

Thereafter, the categories and themes were placed together in tabular form in order to describe the narratives. However, this did not make the study quantitative, as the researcher then summarised and interpreted the data and put it into a research report. The researcher subsequently compared the new data to existing data (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos, 2011).

### 1.7.7 Data verification

To ensure the quality of data, reliability and validity are important aspects of research. Reliability is concerned with the consistency of measures (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013), whilst validity is concerned with the instrument of measurement adequately reflecting the true meaning of the concept under investigation (Babbie, 2007). To ensure the reliability and validity of a qualitative study, the researcher has to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

In this research, **reliability and validity** were enhanced by the researcher's member checking through feedback and validation from participants (Strydom & Delport, 2011). This member checking was carried out during the interview process. Since the researcher had a rapport with the participants, she was able to conduct the interviews in a professional, yet informal and relaxed way. During the interviews, the researcher restated, paraphrased and summarised participants' responses to determine the accuracy of her understanding. This allowed

participants to comment and reflect further on their experiences and views. The ultimate aim of this member checking was to provide findings that are authentic, original and reliable.

**Credibility** in research aims to demonstrate the appropriate identification and description of the subject within the parameters of the research participants' views and the researcher's representation thereof (Bless et al., 2013; Schurink, Fouché & de Vos, 2011). The researcher ensured credibility in chapters two and three by establishing a primary and secondary theory and demonstrating the parameters of participants in chapter four.

**Transferability** refers to the extent to which results apply to other similar situations (Bless et al., 2013). In qualitative research, transferability can be challenging as results from one study cannot be precisely generalised for a different population due to factors such as different situations (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos, 2011). Thus, the researcher provided a detailed description of the context in which the data was collected, the methodologies used by the researcher and the theoretical parameters of the research, in order for other researchers to compare and assess any similarities in given situations and contexts and to transfer the findings of this study.

**Dependability** refers to whether the research process is rational, well documented and audited (Bless et al., 2013; Schurink, Fouché & de Vos, 2011). The researcher must be able to indicate that each step has been completed thoroughly and carefully, which in turn shows that the results are in fact dependable (Bless et al., 2013). The researcher demonstrates dependability by explaining the research process in chapters one and four.

**Conformability** requires that other researchers or studies may be able to obtain similar findings by following a similar research process in a similar context (Bless et al., 2013). The researcher ensures conformability by documenting findings from the research study and comparing them with the literature control in the discussion of the findings in chapter four.

### **1.7.8 Ethical clearance**

The primary ethical considerations for this study on harmful supervision pertains to informed consent and voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and discontinuance. Participants have the right to know what the research is about and how it might affect them, and they also have the right to accept or decline participation (Bless et al., 2013). These ethical considerations were met through an informed consent document (Annexure 1), which explains the purpose and the methods of the study and serves as proof that each participant willingly took part in the study. Confidentiality is maintained by being particularly sensitive to



participants' personal information, whilst linked to anonymity and ensuring that there is no association between the findings and the participant (Bless et al., 2013). Thus, the researcher did not record any personal information pertaining to the participants and, in addition, the data collected is stored on a password protected computer and hard copies are stored in a locked cabinet. Discontinuance must be given to every participant, stating they are free to stop participating at any time in the study without negative effects (Bless et al., 2013). This was achieved by informing participants that they are permitted to leave at any point in the interview process. In an attempt to protect the participants from emotional harm when sharing sensitive experiences, the researcher structured questions in such a manner as to move from the general to the more specific. The researcher reiterated that the interviews did not only focus on participants' experiences, but also on their perceptions and professional opinions. However, should debriefing of any participant have been necessary, the researcher would have organised an independent social worker for this purpose and in cooperation with her supervisor at the university. Ethical clearance for this study was provided by the Department of Social Work Ethics Committee (DESC) at the University of Stellenbosch and by the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee (REC). This study is regarded as a medium-risk study, as the nature of the research focuses on the perceptions and experiences of social workers regarding the phenomena of harmful supervision and, more specifically, their professional opinion thereof.

#### **1.7.9 Limitations of the study**

Fouché and Delport (2011) explain that limitations of research are inevitable, even in the most carefully planned research; thus, the researcher needs to be aware of these limitations and present them clearly. The researcher has therefore identified the following limitations in this study on potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers, namely: the sample size was insufficient to make generalisations, and the research was only conducted in the Western Cape. However, the researcher has described the research process in detail in order for supplementary studies of this nature to be carried out in other areas of South Africa and with larger sample sizes.

#### **1.7.10 Presentation**

The research report is comprised of five chapters. Chapter one serves as the introduction to the research, where the problem statement, rationale, goal and objectives, and research methodology are discussed. Chapters two and three focus on the literature reviews for the study. More specifically, chapter two is focused primarily on a conceptual framework for the understanding of supervision and harmful supervision in social work within different

disciplines and within a global and local context, whilst chapter three elucidates the potential factors which may contribute to harmful supervision in social work. Chapter four extrapolates the data collection and data analysis. Lastly, chapter five discusses the conclusions and recommendations derived from the data presented in chapter four.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SUPERVISION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The second objective of this study aims to construct a conceptual framework for the understanding of supervision and harmful supervision within the global and local context of social work. Kadushin and Harkness (2002) explain that supervision as described in conceptual frameworks exists nowhere in practice. This chapter will enable the reader to understand supervision within the paradigm of the perfect execution of supervision and within a ‘perfect world’, in order for the reader to understand the following chapter on harmful supervision. This chapter will explore an expanded definition of supervision, the history of supervision, the functions of supervision and the theories, models and perspectives of supervision. By relying on primary authors such as Kadushin (1976), Botha (1985), Engelbrecht (2010) and Tsui (1997), these authors will then be supplemented with the contemporary work.

#### **2.2 WHAT MANDATES SUPERVISION**

In order to fully understand supervision, there is a need to understand why supervision is significant in the social work profession, as will be discussed in this section. Chiller and Crisp (2012) conducted a study as to why social workers have chosen to serve as professionals for many years, whereby it was reported by participants that supervision was an important part of their wellbeing but also contributed to their service years in the profession. Engelbrecht (2019a) agrees with this, noting that supervision is significant to the social work profession due to the nature and scope of the services rendered by practitioners. According to Hafford-Letchfield, Chick, Leonard and Begum (2008), supervision is central to achieving quality assurance and has an important role in developing a skilled and professional workforce.

From the above, it can be seen that experts strongly agree that access to quality supervision is imperative (Akkenson & Canavess, 2017) in order to improve work performance (Hafford-Letchfield & Huss, 2018) and retain staff. Magnussen (2018) extrapolates that workers who are satisfied with their supervision report greater job satisfaction, while those who are dissatisfied are likely to consider changing jobs or leaving the profession. Supervision is therefore a key component in supporting and retaining the social service workforce (Akkenson & Canavess, 2017). It is thus apparent that supervision is significant within the social work paradigm; however, the significance of supervision may be the downfall of the profession if

not implemented correctly, as this may cause harm. Chapter three will discuss this in more detail.

## **2.3 GOAL AND NEED OF SUPERVISION**

In order to conceptualise supervision, it is imperative to grasp what supervision entails, the goals of supervision and why there is a need for supervision in social work today and in South Africa specifically. In the following section, the definition, goal and need of supervision will be discussed.

### **2.3.1 Definition of supervision**

As with most complex phenomena in social service delivery, the term supervision has no universally accepted definition (Chibaya, 2018) and can be defined for all professions and in several ways at different times (Barker, 1995). Although there is no commonly accepted definition, authors over time have agreed that supervision is the cornerstone of efficient and purposeful service delivery (Davies, Maggs & Lewis, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2019a; Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979). Professionals define supervision for their respective context, however most of these definitions have similar elements describing the nature of supervision.

Several authors (Bogo & McKnight, 2006; Engelbrecht, 2019b; Kadushin & Harkness 2014; Pelser, 1988) agree that the purpose of supervision is to ensure that quality services are rendered and that sound decisions are made by social workers in practise (Caras & Sandu, 2014). This is achieved in the supervision process, whereby the supervisor provides assistance for the development of the social workers' professional skills (Chibaya, 2018). Kadushin and Harkness (2014) agree with this, adding that supervision is intended to ensure that social workers do their jobs effectively and provide efficient and appropriate social work services to clients in the best way possible, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Parker (2017) adds that the ultimate objective of the supervision process is to ensure the delivery of services to clients of the agency in the best possible way in accordance with agency policies and procedures. This means that the onus is on both the supervisor and the supervisee, as the supervisor is accountable to the public to ensure that competent and effective practise is delivered (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). Although some supervisors do not offer services to clients directly, they do impact indirectly on the services rendered (Caras & Sandu, 2014; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014).

Another element contributing to the definition of supervision includes the authority of social workers to delegate and direct supervisees, along with the responsibility for supervisors to

possess a certain equipment of knowledge and skill to be able to take on the responsibility of training someone with less equipment (Freidlander, 2015; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). This element might be one of the reasons why supervision may become harmful. Kadushin and Harkness (2014) add that social workers who possess this authority should be licenced and thus held accountable. The South African Council for Social Service Professions (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) complements this by noting that supervision requires an experienced and qualified social worker in order for authority to be delegated; however, the interpretation of “experienced” is not well defined and could potentially be harmful. Although the supervisor delegates the supervision process, it is still a relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee, where interaction facilitates structured learning (Chibaya, 2018). The Supervision Framework of South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) states that supervision is an ongoing, interactional relationship and process. Botha (2002) supplements this by stating that social work supervision is a learning process that occurs within a specific reciprocal relationship between a supervisor and a social worker. Supervision is thus collectively understood as a process between two people in a professional, participatory and respectful relationship which promotes ongoing learning (Beinart, 2013; Farkas-Cameron, 1995; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Koehn & Kerns, 2016).

For the purpose of this study, supervision will be defined in a South African context using local text, which will ensure that supervision is understood in a theoretically correct manner whilst being context specific. The above-mentioned elements of the definition of supervision are imperative to the local context, as extrapolated in the Code of Ethics and the Rules for Social Workers (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). This document is in place to regulate social work and determines *inter alia* that social workers should be supervised by social workers who are registered with the council (DSD & SACSSP, 2014). This echoes what was mentioned in international literature regarding the possession of social work knowledge and thus being held accountable (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Such accountability links to the SACSSP’s (DSD & SACSSP, 2014) standard of liability for unprofessional conduct in section 5.4.1[e], meaning that professionals should be accountable under the pretence that they are equipped with the correct knowledge and expertise with regard to what ethical supervision practises entail.

Engelbrecht (2019b) has identified thirteen determinants for formulating a definition of social work supervision. These determinants are based on worldwide literature, all of which share common factors in considering a definition of supervision. These determinants include: the goal of supervision, functions of supervision, mandate of supervision, time-span of

supervision, authority of supervisor, configuration of theories, models and perspectives, distinct value and ethical base of supervision, nature of the supervision relationship, designated roles of the supervisor, nature of the supervision process, distinct supervision tasks, supervision methods and supervision activities. These determinants are imperative to formulate a definition for this study, and although all thirteen cannot be fully described within the ambit of this section, they will be elaborated throughout this chapter.

Based on the aforementioned literature (Bogo & McKnight, 2006; Caras & Sandu, 2014; Chibaya, 2018; Davies, Maggs & Lewis, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2019b; Kadushin & Harkness 2014; Parker, 2017; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979), the definition of social work supervision for this study is defined as follows: Social work supervision is the ongoing professional relationship and process between a registered and experienced (meaning in the field of supervision for at least two years of receiving effective and appropriate supervision) social worker as the supervisor and a less experienced worker to whom knowledge is transferred. The knowledge transferred in supervision is founded on expertise and thus, with authority, can be transferred through delegating, coordinating, enhancing and evaluating the practise of the supervisee. Social work supervisors are to be held accountable to the mandate of the national, local and organisational policy and legislation. Supervision should be executed with the primary goal of promoting efficient and professional social work services, as achieved by practising the functions of supervision (education, support and administrative) guided by theories, models, perspective and supervisory skills. Supervision is a process based on ethics and mutual respect in a positive and anti-discriminatory context. Supervision is executed by an agreed upon contract that includes the methods of supervision, durations, expectations, goals, responsibilities and clearly delineated roles. Supervision should be conducted with the goal to enable the supervisee to become an autonomous practitioner and in turn render effective services to service users.

### **2.3.2 Goal and need of supervision**

Supervision in this century has been ingrained in tertiary learning, but has not always been critically examined in practise. In order to examine and to identify the potentially harmful factors which may contribute to harmful supervision, it is important to understand why there is a need for supervision and what practitioners/supervisors aim to achieve with this practise.

The social work profession is especially unpredictable, non-routine, non-standardised, highly individualised and imperceptible in nature according to Botha (2002). This is supplemented by

Kadushin and Harkness (2014), who state that social work is based on ununiformed tasks in an unpredictable context, which makes it tough to codify procedures and means that situations vary and there is no unvarying procedure for any intervention. As noted through Biestek's principles (Johnson & Yanca, 2010), each client should be seen as an individual and no circumstance should be viewed as the same. These statements identify the need for social work supervision, as the profession has no clear-cut intervention or one size fits all, as stated by Engelbrecht (2019b). Carpenter, Webb, Bostock and Coomber (2015) supplement this by asserting that supervision can also be seen as an occasion to receive and seek emotional support for the demanding, volatile and stressful role of being a social worker.

According to a plethora of authors over the years (Davies, Maggs & Lewis, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2019a; Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979), supervision is the cornerstone of good social work practise. Moreover, supervision assists to encourage disheartened practitioners (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014) who are subject to lack of adequate training, structural support and unmanageable caseloads (DSD & SACSSP, 2012), lack of funding and absence of sufficient resources (Brashears, 1995; Laird, Morris, Archard & Clawson, 2017). In order to fulfil the Department of Social Development's recruitment and retention strategy, supervision is necessary, as research findings confirm that the effective practise of supervision is one of the main determinants of staff satisfaction and retention rates (Carpenter et al., 2015; Engelbrecht, 2019a). In addition, the main and overarching goal of social work supervision is to develop workers into competent, autonomous and independent practitioners who render efficient services to clients (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; O'Donoghue, 2003; Tsui, 2005). Organisations are likely to achieve this aim through workers who are skilful, knowledgeable, clear with regard to their roles and are assisted in their practise by sound advice and emotional support from a supervisor whom they have a good professional relationship with (Carpenter et al., 2015).

Supervision is therefore required to ensure that the social services organisations render effective services to enable the social workers to perform at the best level according to their capabilities, as well as to support the social workers to achieve professional autonomy. Thus, without the effective practise of supervision workers are harmed, as further discussed in chapter three.

## **2.4 HISTORY OF SUPERVISION**

As noted by Kadushin and Harkness (2014), supervision has historically always been an important element of social work practise (Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011). In this section, the history of social work internationally and locally will be discussed in order to determine where supervision commenced and how it has potentially become harmful.

### **2.4.1 Internationally**

According to Kadushin and Harkness (2014), there are a few references to social work supervision prior to the 1920s in North America. The practise of supervision and social work developed simultaneously, feeding off the need of support within the volunteer and agent relationship (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). The first mention of supervision within social work in North America (called charity work at the time) concerned the licensing authority to which agencies were accountable for public funds spent towards the services of the client (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). This implies that supervision was more of an inspection or review of the institutions rather than the administration, education and support of the worker, which we understand as supervision today (Austin 1957; Kutzik, 1977; Tsui, 2008; Waldfogel, 1983).

Although social work supervision was mentioned in the early 1880s and 1890s internationally, these practices are not even closely associated to the practise conveyed today (Burns, 1958; White & Winstanley, 2014), as they lack certain functions of supervision (Bruns 1958; Tsui, 2008). Thus, the cornerstone of supervisory practises which built the foundation of supervision as familiarised today started in the nineteenth century (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). In 1878, charity organisation societies, the modern-day social workers, developed in most of the large cities in the eastern United States (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). The facets of service delivery by these organisations included financial assistance and volunteers who were assigned to families to offer personal support and to influence behaviour in a socially acceptable manner.

Rendering services on this basis lead to high turnover rates, causing an increase of work for agencies as the task to recruit and train new volunteers was carried out by a paid agent (the modern-day supervisor) (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Tsui, 2008). Due to the high turnover rates, the organisations desired to obtain paid staff who would supervise and train volunteers to provide a continuity of services (Becker, 1961; Tsui, 2008), as can be seen through the birth of supervision with administrative and educational functions as we know it today. According to Smith (1901), these paid agents were also favourable as they could oversee the records of families and note whether the families visited received satisfactory services. Paid agents were



now the supervisors of the volunteers and were also still supervised by the district committee (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014), meaning that supervisors were fulfilling the middle management position, as is still true for supervision in South Africa today.

As the twentieth century unfolded, supervision evolved and the ratio of paid agents to volunteers decreased, leaving a demand for formal training of social workers (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). This later developed into a tertiary course and formal training, which allowed paid agents to keep workers accountable for their performance, as well as to educate, advise, support and encourage them (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Tsui, 2008). However, even though tertiary education was available, supervision continued to perform an educational function but assumed a more supplementary role. Due to the formalisation of education, supervision became a more prescribed task with a time, place, content and procedure and diversified to different agencies, including correctional services, hospitals and schools (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Although the formalisation of education took place, agencies still retained primary responsibility for the administrative and supportive aspects of supervision and additional education, as highlighted by the functions of Kadushin and Harkness (2014) today, which will be further discussed in the chapter. Therefore, if supervision in modern society is only fulfilling some of its intended functions, it would suggest that supervision is regressing as a practise and could lead to harmful supervision, as will be explored in chapters three and four.

#### **2.4.2 South Africa**

According to Engelbrecht (2019b), the developments in international supervision history and practice influenced South African supervision practises in a similar way to other methodologies of social work, as South African literature is inspired by the developed world. As mentioned above, supervision originated in Europe and North America in 1878 (Munson, 2002). However, only in 1961 did South Africa see the first work on supervision published by Pieterse (1961), who abstracted supervision in a group context under its administrative function. Du Plessis (1965) subsequently added that the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions should include both the administrative and educational functions of supervision in their departments. This was followed by the birth of a professional journal for scholarly articles on social work, which displayed supervision in the fullness of its administrative and hierarchal nature, with a glimpse of supervision's emerging educational function (Engelbrecht, 2019b).

The turning point for social work supervision in South Africa occurred at the beginning of the 1970s, when the social work dictionary provided an official definition of supervision, although

it failed to mention the functions of supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019b). The emphasis of this definition was on the accomplishment of professional tasks as effectively as possible through the supervision process (Vaktaalkomitee, 1971). It was only in 1971 that South African scholars drew on the work of international texts and described the different functions of supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019a). Accordingly, Botha (1971) described the different functions of supervision based on the problem-solving process of Perlman (1967). Grounded on Botha's (1985) work of the educational model for efficient supervision, which focused on the educational model of supervision, the way was paved for a theoretical foundation in training and practice for supervisors in South Africa. In 1985, some South African universities started offering post-graduate supervision courses and expected students to complete a supervised field component during their studies in supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019b). Another crucial point in South African supervision came with the work of Pelser (1988), who stipulated practise guidelines for supervision that accredited the practice in South Africa with its theoretical and practical foundation.

Around the 1990s, supervision became a less favoured research topic in South Africa due to a rise in other social developmental issues along with a political shift. As a consequence, an affiliated academic shift also took place in postgraduate programmes (Engelbrecht, 2019b). This shift led to political and welfare systems in South Africa also aligning their dispensation of funds and service delivery to areas other than supervision of social workers (Engelbrecht, 2019b). This transition not only resulted in a lack of research, but according to Engelbrecht (2006) also resulted in the "brain drain", which is described as social workers leaving the country or seeking employment outside of the social work profession, to the extent that social work was declared a rare skill (Department of Social Development, 2006). This drain left a gap in knowledge, experience and skill of social work supervision practises, but was partly spanned by the textbook work of Botha in 2002 and renewed by the work of Engelbrecht in 2014 and again in 2019a. Supervision is now understood in the fullness of its functions, with various facets, skills and frameworks to enhance the performance of supervisees and enable them to function independently (Engelbrecht, 2019a).

As supervision develops in South Africa, it is imperative for new understanding and research to bring improvements aimed at cultivating and developing supervision practises and service delivery, as opposed to regressing and contributing to harmful supervision. It can be assumed by the above-mentioned history that supervision was intended to be helpful and that harmful supervision and the factors contributing to harmful supervision were never foreseen.

## 2.5 FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISION

The practise of supervision in social work may be recognised by the distinct functions within service delivery. A cluster of primary authors (Brashears, 1995; Gordon & Schutz, 1977; Kadushin, 1976; Shulman, 1982; Silence, 2017) define supervision as a distinct and separate entity to the practise of social work, by implying that supervisors are professionals who have left direct practice or were social workers prior to becoming supervisors. These statements are based on the assumption that supervision requires a set of skills, behaviours and attitudes which differ from that of social work practice (Kadushin, 1985; Perlmutter, 1990; Sokhela, 2007). Shulman (1982; 2016), on the other hand, argued that while supervisors use skills that are equivalent to those of social workers, their purpose is to educate social workers on those skills and not practise them directly. In agreement to that, other authors (Bramhall & Ezell, 1981; Busse, 2009; Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980; Mordock, 1990) suggest using management and administrative techniques rather than social work skills to practise the supervision process.

In contrast, as seminal authors Reynolds (1942), Trecker (1971) and Morrison and Wannacot (2010) advocated, supervision should be defined as social work practise due to the skills of administration and casework being more similar than different, by fulfilling the basic functions of human needs in a similar process, as supplemented by Karvinen-Niinikoski (2003). Trecker (1971) and Marc, Makai-Dimeny and Oşvat, (2014) also asserted that supervisors demonstrate behaviours, values and principles comparable to those of a practitioner. However, primary authors such as Towle (1963) agree that there are functions in supervision, and whether or not they are similar to social work practise is surly dependent on the organisation in which the worker practises. These functions, as established by Kadushin and Harkness (1976), include the administrative function, the supportive function and the educational function, which can be accompanied by additional functions. Noble et al. (2016) describe these additional functions in supervision, but state that they are either subsidiary functions or extensions of administration, education and support functions of supervision. Some of these functions include *inter alia* supporting and validating supervisees as workers and as people, developing understanding and skills in intervention, ensuring quality of work, and receiving content and work process feedback (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000).

In this section, an exposition of supervision functions will be displayed separately; however, it should be noted that the functions need to be executed in an integrated manner (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Magnussen, 2018; Patterson & Whinecup, 2017). Furthermore, although fulfilling all the functions of supervision could be time consuming, if not executed within the

fullness of the three functions it should not be qualified as supervision and could potentially be harmful, as will be discussed in chapter three.

### **2.5.1 Educational Function**

As deliberated in the previous section on the history of social work supervision, the educational function of supervision has evolved over time, as a body of knowledge has grown from the first-hand experiences of supervisors. The role of supervisor has now expanded to include a method of teaching to volunteers and students who participate in the field of service delivery (Brackett, 1903; Robinson, 1936). The educational function can be regarded as a crucial aspect of achieving the primary goal of supervision, which is to ensure the best service delivery to the service user. Whilst supervisors and supervisees may feel that they have sufficient skills in their specific field of expertise, it is important to keep viewing the educational function as a continuity of professional development, which Engelbrecht (2019a) asserts as one of the basic tenets of best practice supervision.

In supervision, the educational functions that supervisors should perform include teaching, facilitating learning, training, sharing experience and knowledge, informing, clarifying, guiding, assisting workers to find solutions, enhancing professional growth, advising, suggesting and helping workers solve problems (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). These tasks within the educational function in supervision can be carried out by teaching the necessary knowledge and skills essential to the workers' service delivery by a detailed analysis of the work they have to perform (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). This can be achieved when a more experienced professional oversees the work of a less experienced professional in order to develop the adequacy of their professional performance (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). However, the overseeing of case files, for instance, should not be the only task of the educational function in supervision, as this could become administrative and transform into a form of harmful supervision, as to be discussed in chapter three.

By executing the above-mentioned tasks within the supervision relationship and process, supervisees not only grow into successful, effective and efficient practitioners, but also experience job satisfaction (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Magnussen, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019a; Carpenter et al., 2015). Kadushin (2014) explains that two of the three main sources of satisfaction for supervisees relate to the educational function, the first of which entails being assisted in dealing with problems related to caseloads, and the second being assisted to develop into a professional social worker. However, failure to execute this and the other functions in

supervision correctly result in supervisory fails according to Kadushin and Harkness (2014), which are most felt in the area of education in supervision. Thus, it is imperative to grasp the importance of correctly implementing education in supervision, failing which the result of supervision may be harmful.

### **2.5.2 Administration**

According to Shulman (1995) and Tsui (1997), the origin of social work has its roots in the administrative function, as mentioned above in the history of social work supervision. Charity organisation societies in the past used paid agents (today's supervisors) as administrators of programmes. These agents were accountable for the distribution of the agency's resources in addition to overseeing the volunteers (Brashears, 1995). The first tasks of the administrative function in those times involved recruiting, organising and overseeing of volunteers and paid workers (Pettes, 1967). These tasks within administration were then followed by an emphasis on employee rights and responsibility with the contracts between agencies and their workers (Brashears, 1995).

Today, the administrative role of the supervisor includes staff recruitment and selection, inducting and placing the worker, explaining supervision, work planning, work assignment, work delegation, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating work, coordinating work, communication functions, supervisors as advocates, administrative buffers, change agents and community liaisons (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). These tasks pose a huge weight and responsibility upon the supervisor, as it is foreseeable that this function is dominant over the educational and supportive functions (Parker, 2017). Thus, the accountability is initially to the organisation, but is ultimately to ensure positive outcomes for service users (Chibaya, 2018). The onus is therefore on both the supervisor and the worker, as it is their duty to achieve the agencies' objectives in accordance with agency policies and procedures. However, in order to accomplish this in an effective and non-harmful manner requires a reciprocal interpersonal relationship between the administrative supervisor and the supervisee (Henderson, 2003).

Kadushin and Harkness (2014) acknowledge that administration is a process that implements organisational objectives. This means that within the administrative function there is a sense of accountability to the organisation and its objectives, hence placing a greater emphasis on this particular function. According to Parker (2017), there is also an expected accountability to the funders and the Department of Social Development (in the South African context) to complete administrative functions. Along with this, the supervisor executing the administrative

function has the overarching duty to abide by the code of ethics and qualification requirements, which serves to control how practitioners perform in practise (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). According to Bradley et al. (2010), Engelbrecht, (2010) and Jacques (2014), without the administrative role or the proper execution of all its tasks, harmful supervision becomes a prospect especially in South Africa, as the administrative role of supervision takes priority (Engelbrecht, 2019a). Although administration has such a significant role in the supervision relationship, there is also light shed that this function plays into the hands of managerial ideologies, where the emphasis is on efficiency and not quality (Lewis, Packard & Lewis, 2007). This will be discussed in chapter three with regard to harmful supervision.

Within the framework of the administrative function, Fayol (1949) describes functions which could also be viewed in the context of the administrative function of supervision. These functions include planning, organising, leading and control. Planning is considered the primary function of management and assists the organisation to accomplish what it sets out to achieve in its organisational goals (Botha, 2000; DuBrin, 2012; Gatewood, Taylor & Ferrell, 1995; Schermerhon, 2005). Organising considers both the physical and human resources (Nel, 2019) needed to achieve the organisational goals by implementing the necessary plans. Botha (2000) views organising as the act of structuring of the pre-determined tasks of the social work manager in order to reach the desired goal through teamwork. Leading, which is frequently the most demanding on supervisors (Botha, 2000), entails influencing others to achieve the organisational objectives through motivating, directing and creating vision (Engelbrecht, 2019a). Finally, control encompasses measuring the real work performance of employees against a predetermined standard, with the purpose of taking corrective action in the case of significant difference (DuBrin, 2012).

### **2.5.3 Supportive Function**

Educational and administrative functions of supervision are concerned with instrumental needs, whilst the supportive function of supervision is concerned with expressive needs (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Social work supervisees and supervisors face various forms of job-related stress (Light, 2003). Unless there is someone or some resource to assist them in dealing with the stress, these stressors will negatively impact their work and effectiveness (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Thus, there is a need for supportive supervision, as the performance and compliance demands on the supervisee from the administrative supervision, the learning demands from the educational supervision, clients and caseloads as well as the organisational context of social work tasks create job-related stress, which has a negative

influence on social work service delivery (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Supervisors need to execute the supportive function of supervision adequately, as the supportive function is imperative to ensure that supervision does not become harmful when dealing with work-related stress.

Supportive supervision includes techniques such as reassurance, encouragement, recognition of achievement, realistically-based expressions of confidence, approval and commendation, catharsis ventilation, desensitisation and universalisation, attentive listening and communication (Erera & Lazar, 1994). The purpose of fulfilling these techniques within the supportive realm of supervision is to assist workers to feel more at ease with their capabilities and the work they are required to execute. By caring for the carers in supervision, workers are more likely to render effective and efficient services (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014), which is indicative that emotional competence is an essential factor to effective practise (Engelbrecht, 2019a).

To conclude, the functions of supervision comprise the foundation of supervision. The functions provide a clear picture of the norms for supervision, however, within supervision practise they are not as clear. The time spent proportionately on these functions is likely to reflect the organisation's mission, vision and human resources practices (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Social work supervision is in place to promote effective services to clients. It is through the effective implementation of these functions that supervision will achieve its aim and not be harmful to social workers.

## **2.6 THEORIES, MODELS AND PERSPECTIVES**

When it comes to supervision, there are many theories, models and perspectives, though some terms are used interchangeably. As stated by Tsui and Ho (2005:20), studying these may end up in what they describe as a “supervisory jungle”, as the terminology being used refers to both different and similar concepts to accommodate the influences on supervision over time. For the purpose of this study, the development of professional identity theory will be discussed, as supervision has a focus of developing professional identity theories. Additionally, the competency model will be discussed, since supervision aims to create competent practitioners. Lastly, the strengths perspectives will be understood, as extrapolated below.

### **2.6.1 Theories of supervision**

Numerous theories exist in the social work supervision paradigm. This section, however, will focus on the development theory of professional identity, as supervision aims to develop



professional identity. This theory is based on the work of theorists such as Erikson (1968). The theory may appear to pertain to levels of supervision, but should not be seen as a fixed category with prescribed actions and rather as a guideline to point out the goals of developing as a professional identity in supervision (Gibson, Dollarhide, Colette, Moss & Julie, 2010). Engelbrecht (2019a) defines the developmental theory as supervision in progressive stages of development in the supervisee's professional identity. This ranges from novice to advanced level with intermediate in between.

This theory provides the basis for the interaction between the supervisor and the supervisee by building the foundation of critical thinking in their work performance (Chibabya, 2018). Stoltenberg and colleagues (1998) developed a model for growth in supervision, based on motivation, autonomy and awareness. This model is helpful not only to the supervisor but also to the supervisee, as they are able to be honest regarding their intentions and developmental stages. The basis of these developmental stages refers to the motivation of the beginner supervisee for supervision until they become advanced, and what their motivation then becomes. According to Engelbrecht (2019a), as a beginner, supervisees are motivated to be supervised as they are driven by anxiety and the need to gain skills in order to execute the tasks at hand, whilst an advanced professional will also be motivated to attend supervision, albeit more due to security in their professional identity.

Autonomy and awareness also appear within these developmental stages of supervision (Gibson et al., 2010), where it is evident that an intermediate position is the least favourable position. When an intermediate social worker begins to gain autonomy, they may feel ambivalent about attending supervision as they possess more confidence to execute their required tasks (Chibaya, 2018). An advanced worker, on the other hand, has awareness of their strengths and challenges and will take up the ownership of their own education (Engelbrecht, 2019a). These developmental stages provide a good indication of the potentially harmful nature of supervision when the social worker's professional identity is not secure, yet the person's years of experience lead to the worker being promoted. An example is the supervisor not seeing the need to supervise their supervisee due to the latter having only an intermediate motivation before being promoted to a supervisory position. This theory can thus identify a supervisee's professional identity before promoting the person to a supervisory role, in turn preventing harmful supervision practises.



### **2.6.2 Models of supervision**

In terms of supervision, a model is defined as a structured and adaptable exposition of reality (Sharlow & Doel, 2006). The competency model of supervision was selected as it focuses on outcomes and how these outcomes will be reached, which is centred on outcomes-based education (Parker, 2017) that is part of the supervision process and relationship. Outcomes-based education is a helpful way (if done correctly) to eradicate harmful supervision, as it focuses on the demonstration of outcomes, specific assessment criteria, retrospective planning and facilitation (Engelbrecht, 2019a). Outcomes-based supervision is also in line with the South African Qualifications Authority's (SAQA) requirements to meet specific learning outcomes in academic training (Lombard, Grobbelaar & Pruis, 2003). In addition, there are specific assessment criteria that can be used to indicate different levels and categories of competencies, which should be engaged in supervision activities (Parker, 2017).

Guttman, Eisikovits and Maluccio (1988) identify certain content categories according to which competencies can be distinguished. These include intellectual competencies, performance competencies, personal competencies and consequence competencies. These competencies can be used to determine, execute and evaluate essential competencies for practise (Parker, 2017; Engelbrecht, 2019a). Intellectual competencies refer to knowing what to do and when to do it. This is focused on both abstract and practical knowledge. Performance competencies speak of how to act appropriately in situations, integrating theory and practise of social work. Personal competencies promote the supervisee's self-awareness and self-development aspects including the supervisee's professional identity, personality traits and emotional intelligence to the benefit of intervention with service users. Lastly, consequence competencies avail the supervisee's ability to reflect and evaluate all aspects impacting their intervention. If the competencies of both the supervisor and the supervisee are understood, then harmful supervision practises may not take place as supervisors are competent and so are supervisees.

### **2.6.3 Perspectives of supervision**

Supervisors adopt various perspectives in social work supervision. However, one fundamental perspective, the strengths-based perspective is often missed by a traditional problem-orientated paradigm of supervision practise (Kadushin, 1976). Cohen (1999) discerns that problem-solving supervision may undermine the strengths-based practise. A strengths perspective focuses on strengths, competencies, capacities, capabilities and resilience instead of on

problems and pathology, and should thus be incorporated in supervision practises. For this reason, it is important to discuss this perspective in this study.

The strengths perspective does not deny the developmental needs of the supervisee, but rather is viewed as an effort to focus on the supervisee's intellectual, performance, personal and consequence competencies as discussed previously (Engelbrecht, 2019a). Engelbrecht (2010) identified principles of the strengths-based perspective in supervision, namely that supervision should not be crisis driven, that the supervisor will need to assume a facilitation role by adopting a strengths vocabulary, and that the supervision process will be based on the competencies and outcomes of the supervisee. This perspective is aimed at promoting motivation, awareness and autonomy of supervisees (O'Donohue, Munford & Trlin, 2006). However, this can only be achieved by the supervisor assuming a facilitative role and ignoring the power associated with the word supervisor (Engelbrecht, 2019a). Along with that, the supervisee must also accept co-responsibility for the development of their supervision (Parker, 2017). If supervisors have a good understanding of these basic theories, models and perspectives, their supervision can be helpful as intended, but in the absence of the execution of any grounded theory, model or perspective, supervision may potentially be more harmful than helpful.

## **2.7 METHODS OF SUPERVISION**

According to the Supervision Framework for social work in South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012), two methods typically need to be available to the supervisory process, namely group and individual methods of supervision, in order to meet the different needs of different workers. These needs are also specific to the organisation, the social worker, the clients and the goals set out to achieve (Tsui, 2005).

### **2.7.1 Individual Supervision**

The Supervision Framework for Social Work South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) describes individual supervision as an intense process that promotes growth. Individual supervision, as the name suggests is a one-on-one process, where the supervisor accepts the role of administrator, supporter and educator, as per the supervision functions discussed above. Engelbrecht (2019a) notes that individual supervision has traditionally been the predominant model for student supervision. Individual supervision may be a potential factor for harmful supervision, as due to the supervision being one-on-one there might be less accountability and security for the supervisee to identify when receiving harmful supervision. Various authors

(Cooper, 2006; Egan, 2012; Hair, 2013; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Nguyen, 2003; O'Donoghue, 2003; Tsui, 2004) establish that internationally, individual supervision sessions are an hour to an hour and a half long and can occur weekly, hinting that on the run supervision is insufficient. Individual supervision is prodigious for individualised focus on professional development in education and support due to the private nature of the supervision sessions. As mentioned previously though, for the same reason individualised supervision can also be harmful.

### **2.7.2 Group supervision**

The Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) elaborates that group supervision is often used to supplement individual supervision rather than substitute supervision. This could be extremely helpful, as social workers may then share their knowledge and expertise with the group members. This is specifically effective when implementing the educational function of supervision, as these sessions are also led by a supervisor. It should be noted however that caution should be given when working with group members who are too diverse or have different levels of training (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Zeira and Schiff (2010) suggest that individual supervision is being replaced with group supervision due to financial constraints. This appears to be effective, especially with regard to time constraints for supervisors, but logically could potentially be harmful to the supervisee as it does not account for the personal nature of support, education and administration. Engelbrecht (2019a) notes that supervisees are less likely to share in group supervision and also feel more anxious in such a setting, which could be due to factors including the relationship or previous experience with the other members in the supervision group.

Supervision of social workers is imperative, whether it be group supervision or individual supervision. However, supervision in each method must be done correctly. The reason for this is that if group supervision does not accommodate individual personal plans and learning needs of supervisees, it should then not be regarded as pure supervision and thus could potentially be harmful.

## 2.8 CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

In our ever-evolving society, social work and supervision alike must remain abreast with technological advancements, changing styles and the supervision profession as a whole. This section will discuss how supervision has become more management focused as well as education for supervisors.

### 2.8.1 Managerialism

When drawing on contemporary aspects of social work supervision in South Africa, it can be noted that a significant link exists between social work supervisors and managers (Silence, 2017). This likely has its own array of challenges; however, Engelbrecht (2019a) shows that management needs to be discussed within the supervision paradigm as the survival of social services depends to a great extent on how well social workers are managed, lead and presumably how well they are supervised. Thus, in the South African context supervision and management cannot be separated.

Management of social work, as defined by Lewis, Packard and Souflee (2001), is a process of making a plan to achieve the desired social end by organising people and resources to carry out the plan, whilst at the same time encouraging workers to perform the tasks and then to evaluate the results. Management emerged from an ever-evolving welfare system struggling to find solutions to growing problems and changes in the environment (Lambly, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2019a). It is therefore important that managers and leaders switch priorities and organisational goals to ensure more effective management systems and practises to be responsive to cultural diversity, for enhancing skills, encouraging growth and equipping staff and project management, to name just a few (Engelbrecht, 2019a).

In line with the above, it is apparent that management plays a crucial role in the management and supervision of social welfare organisations. However, acknowledging the fundamental difference between for-profit businesses and management of social service organisations is imperative. When these lines are crossed managerialism sets in, where managers are concerned more with the power and influence of the organisation than meeting the needs of the service users (Enteman, 1993; Lambly, 2010; Rogowski, 2011). Managerialism fails to recognise the importance of the emotional life of human beings as well as the importance of relationships. This failure hinders the quality and effectiveness of the social work (Trevithick, 2014) and erodes the practise (Lambly, 2010), potentially leading to harmful supervision.

Within the South African context, management and supervisory roles are clearly closely linked. However, as mentioned above, if supervision is not carried out correctly it can be harmful. Furthermore, whilst managers as supervisors are in the correct place to organise staff, they may fall into managerialism and neglect their supervisory role, resulting in harmful supervision.

### **2.8.2 Education of supervisors**

Within the supervision paradigm, education is seen as an important function for improving supervisees' performance and interaction with clients (Bogo, 2015). Supervisors are expected to transfer their knowledge and experience for the greater good of the organisation, the social workers and the service being rendered (Lee, Kim & Yun, 2017). Thus, the question can be asked: Are supervisors receiving sufficient education in order to educate supervisees? The retention rate of social workers is likely to increase if all the aspects of education, from entry to early years of practise are linked to reasonable and supported workload with effective supervision. This is deduced from the statement that education is a vital part of supervision, for both supervisors and supervisees.

Significant elements of professional supervision include the quality of decision-making and interventions; line management and organisational accountability; caseload and workload management; and the identification of further personal learning, career and development opportunities (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). These elements require educational content from the supervisor and can only be executed with competence if the supervisor has up-to-date knowledge (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). In South Africa, social workers are mandated through continuing professional development points (CPD) to participate in activities of a professional nature in order to remain registered by the SACSSP. The purpose of these points is to ensure that registered and practising professionals continuously develop their attitudes, skills and knowledge to safeguard professional standards and ethics that promote excellence in practise.

Whilst these learning opportunities present themselves for social workers, they are less prevalent for supervisors. This can be problematic, as the developmental needs of social work supervisors is great due to the rapid changes in society and practise. The quality of practise education would benefit from supervisors receiving focused training with formal assessments, feedback, relationship-building and the applicability and limitations of different approaches and models in supervision. This can only be achieved by ensuring that the people training social workers at universities seek and receive adequate training pertaining specifically to supervision.

Therefore, it is evident that managerialism can play a significant role in the supervision relationship. However, whilst most supervisors play a role in the management process, managerialism in itself may be harmful to supervision and social work as a whole. On the other hand, the education of supervisors is as crucial as avoiding managerialism. Without focused training on new developments in the supervision and social development paradigm for supervisors, the practise may become just a task that has no meaning or, even worse, entails harmful supervision.

### **2.8.3 Styles of supervision**

The Supervision Framework for Social Work South Africa (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) states that due to our attitudes, expectations and personal experiences we all have preferred styles of communication, and specifically preferred styles of supervision. The various styles notwithstanding, all styles of supervision should be applied within the developmental social work approach (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Hunt (1974) describes supervisory styles as a series of behaviour patterns used by supervisors to establish a working relationship with their supervisees. These patterns include the creation of an appropriate learning climate (Balsam & Garber, 1970; Markovitz, 1958), the overcoming of resistance (Mayer & Rosenblatt, 1975), and the fostering of supervisees' satisfaction with the process (Allen & Krause, 1988).

Dublin (1989) suggests that a flexible application of the supervisory styles should be utilised to suit specific supervisory needs, the personality fit between supervisee and supervisor, the learning style of the supervisee and the supervisee's values and motivations, as all these factors affect the supervisory interaction. This is significant in ensuring that the education function is fulfilled in a meaningful way, and that the supervisee is gaining from the learning experience rather than just ticking the box. Munson (1993) suggests that two types of styles are usually adopted by supervisors. The first is an active and direct approach with focused and pointed questions, as well as clear and structured answers and interpretations. The second style is a reactive style, whereby the supervisor is more subdued and indirect, limits questioning and refrains from providing answers. Through the understanding of these styles, the supervision relationship can mesh and supervision can achieve its goals in an effective, efficient and non-harmful manner.

Supervision in social work is transforming, especially in South Africa (Engelbrecht, 2019b). There is thus a pressing need for social workers and supervisors alike to keep up with contemporary developments to ensure that harmful practise of supervision is being taught in

order to curb this practice. Supervisors need to be well educated in their field of expertise and supervision, to understand the fine line of managing and supervising and be adaptive in their supervision style.

## **2.9 SUPERVISION PROCESS AND ASSOCIATED TASKS**

The supervision process and associated tasks are a fundamental aspect of the supervisory relationship and the growth of the supervisee. Kadushin and Harkness (2014) suggest that the supervision process includes a beginning, middle and an end phase. Tsui (2005) elaborates that the supervision process consists of the supervision contract, an appropriate method of supervision and a developmental plan. Engelbrecht (2019a) suggests a cyclical supervision process consisting of engagement, assessment, planning, contracting, implementation and evaluation phases. It is important to note that this process is able to move backwards and forwards within the associated tasks, which are as follows: identifying job-specific inventories, personal development assessment, personal development plan, the supervision contract, supervision sessions, reflection tools, supervision reports and portfolios of evidence and, lastly, the performance evaluation (Engelbrecht, 2019a). If supervision is not fulfilling these tasks, it is likely that harmful supervision is taking place, as to be discussed in chapter three.

## **2.10 CONCLUSIONS**

To conclude, this chapter aimed to provide an overview of social work supervision and how practises, elements, functions and types of supervision in the perfect scenario benefit not only the supervision relationship, but also the client–supervisee relationship. The goal of supervision is to equip practitioners through the supportive functions of supervision (educational, administrative and supportive) in order to render the best possible services to the client. With the development of supervision internationally and locally, the value of effective and non-harmful supervision is clear, provided the appropriate theories, models and perspectives are applied.

Due to the high work-related stress of social work practise, supervision is essential to ensure lower worker turnover rates and contented practitioners. Without this however, the process of supervision is worthless and potentially doing more harm than good. The following chapter will explore the potential factors which contribute to harmful supervision and make this highly essential practice injurious.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **FACTORS THAT COULD POTENTIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO HARMFUL SUPERVISION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter extrapolated the detailed functions, purpose and meaning of supervision to social workers. These focus points can be viewed as the “perfect” way to present supervision in order to achieve the full mandate and perfect balance between improving client outcomes and cultivating well-rounded practitioners (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). However, supervisees argue that theory and practise are worlds apart and the desired outcomes of supervision are not being attained (Chibaya, 2018; Magnussen, 2018). This is becoming a major threat to the social work profession, as confirmed by Ellis (2014) who found that between 25% and 35% of mental health supervisees in the United States and 40% of mental health supervisees in the Republic of Ireland were classified as currently receiving harmful supervision. This indicates that there is growing evidence that supervision might not be fulfilling its purpose (Reiser & Milner, 2017), despite intentions to do no harm (Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman & Kangos, 2017). This leads to another question: Is supervision then necessary if it is doing more harm than good? Hafford-Letchfield and Huss (2018) maintain that social work supervision is essential to the social work profession, however more investigation is needed to establish evidence for effective and improved means of supervision practises. This starts by identifying where supervision is going wrong.

This chapter will elucidate various factors that may influence the practise of supervision, which could in turn result in harmful supervision. As the various factors are discussed, it is imperative to keep in mind that each of these could have an influence and/or flow into another. Each factor cannot be seen as a single standing factor, but rather as aspects of a multifaceted theory divided into potential factors. Hence, any of these factors can influence supervision positively in fulfilling the supervision goals and functions, or negatively, resulting in harmful supervision. Although each profession has its own unique corpus of knowledge and skills, supervision of health and human services professionals is grounded in theories and practices common to all (Beddoe, 2017). This section will therefore draw on work from business management and economics, psychology and social work supervision. The factors mentioned here are not exhaustive and there may be many more which will be empirically identified. Nevertheless, those that will be identified in this chapter are the most salient, prevalent and potential in



available research, specifically by Ammirati and Kaslow (2017); Reiser and Milne (2017); Beddoe (2017); Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman and Kangos (2017) and McNamara, Kangos, Corp and Ellis (2017), to name a few.

### **3.2 HARMFUL SUPERVISION VERSUS INADEQUATE SUPERVISION**

In the previous chapter, the purpose, roles and functions of supervision were discussed. In this section, the focus will be placed on the expectation of the working relationship between a supervisor and supervisee, and will also differentiate between harmful supervision and inadequate supervision.

#### **3.2.1 What the supervisory relationship should look like**

To fulfil the functions and purpose of supervision, it must be recognised that in optimal circumstances both the supervisor and supervisee have the responsibility to make a success out of supervision (Falender & Shafranske, 2012; Reiser & Milner, 2017) during the course of a supervisory relationship. If a positive supervisory relationship is maintained, receiving critical or challenging feedback, which is inevitable within the supervisory process, will be well received (Beddoe, 2017). This will ensure that the feedback given is developmentally relevant and forms part of the educational function in order to grow the supervisee, rather than break the person down. Supervisors need to be mindful, warm, engaged and self-reflective with their interactions (Beddoe, 2017; McNamara, Kangos, Corp, Ellis & Taylor, 2017). At the same time, they also need to be aware of their power and responsibility as gatekeepers of the profession and protectors to the public (Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman, Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Kangos, 2017). While supervisees are not responsible for the quality of the supervision they receive (Reiser & Milner, 2017), they must be willing to learn and grow within the relationship as all relationships require two parties.

According to Ammirati and Kaslow (2017), a supervisory relationship should be characterised by open, two-way communication and useful feedback that is delivered in a timely and honest fashion. It also requires finding the fine balance of support and affirmation with constructive developmental criticism (Beddoe, 2017). Although supervisors are in the leading and experienced role of the supervision relationship, it is important to emphasise that supervisees should also take ownership of the supervision dyad. The supervisory relationship thus needs to promote tolerance and respect for one another within its professional boundaries. Engelbrecht (2019a) acknowledges the professional status of social work and supervision. It must therefore be borne in mind that although social workers study and apply theory on rendering services

with different models and perspectives to services users in practise, supervision is an important aspect of the profession for which social workers have studied, and this should not be neglected. Accordingly, when professional boundaries are crossed and not aligned with the above-mentioned characteristics within the supervision relationship, it should be seen in the same light as crossing professional boundaries with clients (Briggs 2000; O'Donoghue, 2003). It must also be acknowledged that there are insufficient checks and balances (McNamara et al., 2017; Reiser & Milner, 2017) within supervision to regulate supervisory relationships that do not cohere with these characteristics.

### **3.2.2 Is inadequate supervision harmful?**

As mentioned in the previous section, it is indisputable that supervision as a professional practise has the potential, if executed correctly to be a positive experience, which develops not only a supervisee's professional identity but also their wellbeing in the social service profession (Aladağ, 2013; Carkhuff, 2000; Cormier & Hackney, 2008; Egan, 1975; Uslu & Arı, 2005). Supervision as a professional practise in South Africa is regulated by the Supervision Framework (Department of Social Development, 2006). Hence, when it comes to regulating supervision, professionals know that the Supervision Framework is the primary yardstick for the standard of supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019a). However, complying with supervision standards in order to tick a box (Trevithick, 2014), or not complying at all, are equally degenerating to the profession and ultimately to service users as well. Due to the array of degenerating practises, there is a need to distinguish between the terms inadequate supervision and harmful supervision, also referred to in literature as abusive supervision (Lian, Lance Ferris & Brown, 2011; Tepper, 2000).

According to Ammirati and Kaslow (2017), inadequate supervision is characterised by the supervisor not fulfilling the triad of functions and responsibilities associated with supervision. This at first sight may not appear to cause clear harm to the supervisee, but according to Ellis (2014) and Ammirati and Kaslow (2017) might result in harm to service users. Inadequate supervision may be more common in South Africa than prescribed supervision due to the high caseloads and meagre resources (Engelbrecht, 2010). Although there is no justification for this lack of professionalism, Chibaya (2018) extrapolates that on the run supervision is a reality. Such supervision entails supervision without a contract and the given steps and phases in the supervision process to achieve learning goals and objectives. On the run supervision is not supervision in itself, but is merely "telling" and instructing. In comparison to the definition of supervision in chapter two, on the run supervision fails to fulfil supervision based on

Engelbrecht's (2019a) determinants. Hence, on the run supervision does not operationalise the definition of supervision and should not even be called supervision per se. Other inadequate forms of supervision include managerialism, no supervision, one size fits all, check ins and only fulfilling certain functions of supervision, all of which should be seen as violation of the ethical code of the SACSSP (DSD & SACSSP, 2012; Eryilmaz & Mutlu, 2017; Trevithick, 2014). According to Toby (2015), such violation is "an almost intolerable form of crime against humanity."

Furthermore, harmful supervision is characterised by two components. The first is the supervisee being genuinely harmed in some way by the supervisor's actions or lack thereof (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017). The second is when the supervisor's behaviour is known to cause harm, but the supervisee may not identify the actions as harmful (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017). Harmful supervision will be defined in detail in the section to follow. However, in order to understand the spectrum ranging from exceptional to harmful (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014), there is a need to understand that supervision that is inadequate is harmful (Ellis et al., 2014).

It is therefore apparent that the supervision relationship and characteristics are crucial to achieving exceptional supervision and avoiding harmful or inadequate supervision, which is equally defective. The following section will define harmful supervision fully and identify characteristics associated with harmful supervision.

### **3.3 WHAT IS HARMFUL SUPERVISION?**

The previous section established that no supervision and ineffective supervision both fall under harmful supervision. For the purpose of this study, an all-encompassing definition of harmful supervision needs to be formulated in order to be conscious of the harmful supervision practices, even if participants and supervisees are not. This section will also classify characteristics and identify signs of harmful supervision.

#### **3.3.1 Defining harmful supervision**

The Supervision Framework (Department of Social Development, 2006) is in place to uphold the profession and its norms and standards (Engelbrecht, 2019a) for practise. Practitioners are therefore required to deduce that non-compliance to the framework results in harmful supervision practises that are unethical and wrong, albeit all too common (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017). This commonality might be due to a lack of a concrete definition and yardstick of what harmful supervision entails (Ellis, 2001). As previously determined, inadequate supervision is harmful supervision (Beddoe, 2017; Borders, 2017). However, physically assaulting a

supervisee or answering a phone call during supervision, although both are harmful, are not the same action. Therefore, the definition will be based on a spectrum from mildly harmful to extremely harmful supervision, while keeping in mind that anything on the spectrum is harmful and should not be tolerated in practise.

According to Beddoe (2017), irregular, unfocused supervision, and an inattentive supervisor or a supervisor with a problematic theoretical orientation are harmful to supervision. These points are just the start of harmful supervision and should be identified and handled in a serious manner to prevent a progression of harmful supervision (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017). Likewise, not promoting career-long supervision, clear goal setting and not adhering to checks and balances, such as professional disclosure statements (McNamara et al., 2017; Reiser & Milner, 2017), are early signs of harmful supervision which should not be tolerated. Supervisors and supervisees both have the responsibility within the supervisory relationship; however, supervisors should be the experts, commissioned to fulfil the triad of functions through being prepared for supervision, providing consistent feedback and documentation and assisting with problem solving (Reiser & Milner, 2017). When these tasks are not completed, a supervisor steps onto the spectrum of harmful supervision. For supervisors to fulfil these functions, they need to have the correct training, qualifications and experience, as when this is not the case, the risk of a supervisor facilitating harmful supervision increases. Other early noticeable signs to watch out for include not having the supervisee's best interest in mind, and supervisors putting their needs above those of the supervisee (Borders, 2017). This could manifest as not meeting at agreed-upon times, shortening sessions and handling other work during supervision (Beddoe, 2017).

Although the above-mentioned signs point more towards the lower and less harmful end of the harmful supervision spectrum, they should still be seen as harmful supervision and not be overlooked, as they have the potential to develop into a more serious form of harmful supervision. This may include actions such as not being accountable to the Supervision Framework or having a weak supervisory style (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017), and by chatting and crossing professional boundaries on an emotional level within supervision, thus not fulfilling the educational role (Beddoe, 2017). Kluemper, Mossholder, Ispas, Bing, Iliescu and Ilie (2018) allude that allowing any form of harmful supervision opens a door for destructive behaviours towards supervisees. Such behaviour could present as irritable outbursts, public ridicule and scapegoating (Beddoe, 2017; Luemper et al., 2018; Trepper, 2007), all of which are harmful supervision practises and can lead supervisors to develop a negative view of

supervisees, causing a counterproductive work environment (Kluemper et al., 2018). There are many factors that contribute to harmful supervision (as will be discussed in the following section). However, it is clear that micro aggressions (Beddoe, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017), acting inappropriately or with malice (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017), any physical, sexual or verbal abuse (Beddoe, 2017), or any form of racism, sexual harassment, stigmatisation or judgement on the basis of race or culture (Beddoe, 2017; Chan & McAllister, 2014; Reiser & Milner, 2017) are all forms of harmful supervision. In addition, and at the higher and more noticeable end of the spectrum, behaviour including physical, sexual and emotional abuse (which could be through silent treatment) (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017), withholding resources, rumours and crossing professional boundaries by having sexual relations or using drugs with supervisees (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017) all constitute harmful supervision. While some of these may appear obvious, it is important to note that such behaviours are still occurring (Ellis et al., 2013). Finally, harmful supervision can also occur due to harmful supervisors (convicted, or known to be) not being removed from the profession and being allowed to supervise other novice social workers or any professional.

Based on a synthesis of the notions of these authors (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017; Beddoe, 2017; Borders, 2017; Chan & McAllister, 2014; Ellis, 2001; Kluemper et al., 2018; McNamara et al., 2017; Reiser & Milner, 2017; Trepper, 2007), a formal definition of harmful supervision can be formulated as follows:

Harmful supervision is a practise that is destructive to the social work profession, to service users, students and supervisees. Harmful supervision is supervision that is inadequate, characterised by any behaviour or action that does not uphold the ethical values and standards of the Supervision Framework, as outlined by the Department of Social Development (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Harmful supervision practise also includes not having supervision. More specifically, harmful supervision is a spectrum of behaviours that break down supervisees emotionally, physically and professionally. This malpractice can be performed in groups or in individual supervision. Moreover, harmful supervision can happen to anyone and also be performed by anyone. Harmful supervision can take an overt or covert form, both equally harmful. Harmful supervision is an array of supervision that does not meet the minimum norms and standards, but also supervision that just ticks the boxes and does not fulfil the triad of supervision functions successfully, which presents in supervision that is not career long, regular or professional and undivided. When supervision is not a cyclical process consisting of engagement, assessment, planning, contracting, implementation and evaluation, it is harmful

to supervisees. Supervision and the full process is also harmful when executed by someone who is known to have presented harmful supervision previously, or someone who is not experienced or trained in the practise of supervision. Any form of a supervisory relationship that crosses professional boundaries is harmful. Finally, any supervisor who uses verbal or nonverbal actions to bully, belittle or do anything other than educate, support and encourage supervisees should be regarded as harmful. Along with this, any racist, prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour, whether intentional or not, should also be regarded as harmful.

The definition of harmful supervision portrays what the sophisticated practise of supervision is intended to be but which is not fulfilled in practice. Having discussed what supervision should be and what harmful supervision is, the following section will look at various factors that contribute to harmful supervision.

### **3.4 POTENTIAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HARMFUL SUPERVISION**

As discussed in chapter two, supervision needs to be fulfilled accurately within the triad of supervisory functions in order to fulfil its purpose and prevent harmful supervision. However, there is growing evidence that supervision may still be experienced as harmful (Ellis et al., 2013). This section will discuss certain factors that could contribute to harmful supervision and where they fall on the spectrum as previously deliberated. The factors to be discussed below should be seen within the paradigm of the Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) and the ethical mandate to do no harm. It must be kept in mind that none of these factors can be seen in isolation, but must be viewed as a whole with each factor potentially having an influence on another. The factors selected are prevalent in current literature, though many more may be empirically identified.

#### **3.4.1 Leadership beliefs and power relations**

In any work situation, a hierarchy or a formal structure exists that allows the business or organisation to run efficiently. If everyone was fulfilling the same role and there was no “leader” with more experience or skills to set an example, there would be very few successful organisations. Magnussen (2018) extrapolates that the supervisor is usually more qualified and experienced than the supervisee, which assists in leading the organisation. However, it also reinforces a clear position of authority and power within the superior-subordinate relationship, which impacts the supervisory relationship and can contribute to harmful supervision through supervisory harm (Chan & McAllister, 2014) and various other channels, as to be discussed below.

Although Akesson and Canavers (2017) acknowledge that it is important to work within a top-down structure, it is equally important that leaders should be caring and skilled to ensure supervision is done well and executes its intended function. It is inevitable that hierarchical power within the supervision relationship will play a significant role in the supervision process, but if not handled correctly could lead to harmful supervision. This is due to supervisors, who are empowered by their role to be the gatekeepers of the profession as experts (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Ellis et al., 2017), regarding supervisees as the novice or apprentice (Beddoe, 2017; Hair, 2014). This hierarchical system is not fit for its purpose of gatekeeping if harmful supervision within the supervisory relationship is still occurring due to power relations (Beddoe, 2017). Within modern work organisations, supervisors are the organisational authorities with the most control over employee work experiences and outcomes (Chan & McAllister, 2014; Beddoe, 2017). For this reason, they should have a clear understanding of positional power in order not to misuse it, whilst using their expert power to impart knowledge to supervisees (Beddoe, 2017). Ultimately, abused, misused or unacknowledged power results in harmful supervision (McNamara et al., 2017). Beddoe (2017) agrees, by stating that supervisors have far too much power in her opinion. Power can be misused to coerce supervisees to disclose personal information (McNamara et al., 2017), or to accept supervision that they would otherwise not have accepted or disclosed. Thus, power within the supervisory relationship is a high-risk factor for harmful supervision, as the checks and balances within power dynamics are minimal.

Whilst power dynamics are still an inherent aspect as a result of hierarchical supervision (Kluemper et al., 2018; Pieterse, 2018), it is still a relationship that requires care. If there is no care, supervisees describe that they see themselves in a bureaucratic relationship, with unrealistic expectations accompanied by high workloads and feelings of being overwhelmed (Hafford-Letchfield & Huss, 2018). Ultimately, it is the supervisees and supervisors who have a complementary responsibility for the success of supervision (Reiser & Milner, 2017). However, it is still the supervisor's responsibility as the expert to address the power dynamics within the supervisory relationship, as it relates to the way in which supervisees' experience the supervisory role (Pieterse, 2018) and in turn the relationship. In any relationship there are personalities. In itself, this does not contribute to harmful supervision, however, if a supervisor has a controlling personality and desires to control or exploit supervisees with their dominating personality, it can be seen as coercive and harmful supervision (Kluemper et al., 2018). Alternatively, a supervisor might be less aware of issues of power compared to their



supervisees, and infrequently engaging their supervisees in a purposeful conversation about issues of power also cause harm and obscurity (Cook, McKibben & Stefanie, 2018; Reiser & Milner, 2017; Beddoe, 2017). McNamara, Kangos, Corp, Ellis and Taylor (2017) state that when supervisors are sensitive to their position of power, supervisees are well positioned to grow professionally and to learn within the supervisory relationship.

Supervisory relationships thus inevitably experience blockages or stumbling blocks in the supervision process as it entails two different people with different personalities. According to Engelbrecht (2014), previous experiences, personal inhibition, defensive routines, conflict of roles and organisational constraints will affect both parties and the supervisory relationship. However, blockages if not identified and stopped will lead to power games that can only occur if both parties participate. This is degenerative for the supervisory relationship, the organisational culture and could be seen as a form of harmful supervision. Power games can also be due to anxiety and stress as well as fear of exposing incompetency (Tsui, 2005). Such power games are used to manipulate, reduce power and control the situation, none of which are conducive to effective supervision. Tsui (2005) extrapolates some of the supervisee and supervisor games which affect the power balance within the supervisory relationship. Supervisee games include the supervisee seducing or flattering their supervisor, appealing for empathy or changing the relationship from professional to social. This can be achieved by saying things such as “Friends do not evaluate each other”, or testing the supervisor’s knowledge by asking them a question pertaining to expertise or claiming to know more than them. Other tactics include playing on emotions and blaming other parties or authorities (Engelbrecht, 2019a). As mentioned above, it requires two parties to be involved in power games, and supervisors will frequently manipulate supervisees by passing the blame to other authorities, In this way, they become more like supervisees through stating saying things such as “They won’t let me” or “I’m in the same situation as you”. Other ways include asserting unnecessary power by bossing around or threatening to report the supervisee (Engelbrecht, 2019a).

It is clear that the role of power is significant in the supervisory relationship. However, if misused or not handled correctly, either intentionally or unintentionally, power can be detrimental to supervision and the supervisee in the form of harmful supervision. Supervisors need to understand their power and be open within the supervisory relationship in order to teach and grow rather than disempower. Finally, within the supervisory relationship it is also important to be aware of power games and for both parties to take responsibility for the



relationship. In the South African context, Mamaleka (2018) identifies and extrapolates in detail the destructive effects of power relations in the supervision dyad, which all point to the factors depicted in this section. The research findings of Mamaleka (2018) emphasise that harmful power relations in supervision of social workers may be regarded as the biggest challenge standing in the way of effective supervision in South Africa. This is due to the impact of many determinants, but specifically due to the progressive role managerialism is playing in the South African social work domain (Engelbrecht, 2015).

### **3.4.2 Resources and turnover rates**

Resources are the backbone of any social service, particularly of NGOs or NPOs. However, in the supervision realm the main resource shortage is time, whether it be due to high caseloads or for the use of cognitive resources (McNamara et al., 2017). Due to proper supervision encompassing many functions as discussed in chapter two, it is difficult with high caseloads and organisational pressures (to be discussed later) to execute supervision in its fullness, as extrapolated in the Supervision Framework of South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2006). A plethora of authors also agree that social workers who are content with their supervision report greater job satisfaction and therefore a smaller turnover rate (Beddoe, 2010; Ellett, 2006; O'Donoghue, Wong Yuh Ju & Tsui, 2017).

Owing to a lack of time, Chibaya (2018) has identified that supervision has become “on the run” supervision, where supervisees adhere to an open-door policy and pop in when needing to discuss something. In this way, supervision becomes an informal construct between a supervisee and a supervisor, and often it is the supervisee's responsibility to request a time for supervision (Magnussen, 2018). This is contradictory according to Engelbrecht (2019a), as the responsibility then falls on frontline social workers by the organisations that have employed them. It is uncertain how far these consequences will extend, but it is certain that they are detrimental, as only the administrative function of supervision is usually fulfilled when on the run supervision occurs. According to Reiser and Milner (2017), identity, confidence and professional isolation are long-term effects of this harmful practise. When only one function of supervision is executed, it should be seen as harmful or ineffective supervision, as mentioned above on the spectrum. This in turn has a chain reaction on social workers, the pressure they feel and the turnover rate of employees. Magnussen (2018) agrees that the reason for high turnover rates is because the workload is overwhelming, social workers are not always protected, and the supervision they receive is not sufficient to deal with this (McNamara et al., 2017; Porath & Pearson, 2010). This may also lead to workers experiencing burnout

(Wagaman, Geiger & Shockley, 2015). When burnout occurs, it decreases job performance, increases absenteeism and heightens turnover rates, which decreases the effectiveness of services rendered to clients (Wagaman, Geiger & Shockley, 2015). It is therefore important that workers' performance and turnover rates be considered within the support they receive in supervision, with correlation towards workloads and resources (O'Donoghue, 2003).

With all this in mind, it can be deduced that proper supervision, as spoken of in chapter two is important to keep social workers motivated and, in the profession, to render excellent services to clients. However, anything that falls short of prescribed supervision does not suffice and is on the spectrum of harmful supervision.

### **3.4.3 Gender differences**

In today's society, gender has become a fluid topic of discussion. While sociologically there is a difference between gender and sex, within the context of this study it might not be as relevant. Sex refers to a biological distinction, while gender is the term used to describe socially-constructed categories based on sex (Coates, 2016). However, in today's society there are feminine men and masculine women, males representing themselves as females and vice versa. While the transgender movement should be accounted for, in the case of this study the following reasoning will be seen as a broad overview and not specific to any situation other than supervision. Beddoe (2017) states that our professional identities, whether ethnic, religious or gender related are either grown within supervision or can be a point for distress, thus understanding gender and supervision is vital.

As mentioned previously, all the factors within this chapter influence one another and cannot be seen as separate entities, and gender is no exception. Gender is considered to represent a specific cultural dimension (Engelbrecht, 2019a), but gender in itself can also be specific to culture. Engelbrecht (2019a) describes gender constructs, specifically masculinity and femininity, to be defined by intra-cultural distinctions such as country, ethnicity, religion, generation and class, as will be discussed later in this chapter. However, for this section the focus will be based on stereotypical traits of male and female supervisors within the supervision context and how stereotypical gender roles can influence supervision. For example, it is assumed that men are said to work at an unrelenting pace and take minimal breaks, while Engelbrecht (2014) asserts that women work at a steady pace and take scheduled breaks throughout the day. The female supervisor may thus be less likely to burn out by taking such

breaks, which is good for the supervisory process, while the male might get more work done in a day.

Although gender comparisons such as the above mentioned may be stereotypical and outdated in modern society, the crux of differentiating between genders in supervision is still relevant. On the spectrum of harmful supervision, comparing male and female gender constructs to one another could appear to be quite low. On the other hand, discriminating against women for taking maternity leave (Beddoe, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017), having to care for their children, making inappropriate comments to the opposite sex and assuming certain gender-related roles in supervision are on the higher and more harmful end of the spectrum, some to the extent of being illegal (McNamara et al., 2017). Social work supervision positions are mostly held by women (Bradley, Engelbrecht & Höjer, 2006). This is the expected gender ratio within the profession of social work, which is dominated by females (Department of Social Development, 2006; Mbau, 2005). With the aforementioned and the previous stereotypes in mind, it is apparent that the caring and reflective nature of women aid the supervision process but can also be harmful if not kept professional.

However, when viewing the supervisory styles and gender of male or female supervisors, it is important to critically examine their execution of the supervision process and functions before correlating the effects of gender on supervision. Of even greater standing is that supervisors do not act harmfully on the bases of gender within the supervisory process.

### **3.4.4 Organisational culture as a factor**

Engelbrecht (2019a) defines the supervisor's role within the structure of the organisation as a prominent aspect affecting supervision and the organisational issues that influence supervision. Due to social work supervisors being middle-level managers in South Africa, they play a crucial role in influencing the vertical power and authority through their access to the management hierarchy (Engelbrecht, 2019a). The organisational system, supervisee and supervisor cannot be separated from one another (Reiser & Milner, 2017). This section will therefore discuss organisational cultural and other associated factors which may contribute to harmful supervision.

If supervision is not prioritised at an organisation, structural and organisational issues will always dominate and stand in the way of supervision being executed in its correct manner. In so doing, it will cause harmful supervision through the following factors (Engelbrecht, 2014; 2019a; Beddoe, 2017): scarce resources, unmanageable workloads, counterproductive working

conditions and supervision in a multidisciplinary team, for example a nurse supervising a social worker. When the full functions of supervision are not prioritised, it is evident that the influence of neoliberalism (Ornellas, 2018) comes into play. In turn, this will have a harmful impact on social workers and service users, as managers struggle to meet the organisational imperatives determined by contracts with the government and stakeholders (Rankine et al., 2017). Similarly, merely fulfilling the management role fails to recognise the importance of the emotional life of supervisees and the supervisory relationships, which hinders the quality and effectiveness of supervision (Trevithick, 2014).

Stakeholders influence the practise in organisational and professional domains (Egan, 2012). This challenges social workers, as providing quality services with tight restraints from the government's expectation of service delivery hinders their performance and places pressure on the workers and the supervision process. It is therefore important to critically consider the organisational contexts influencing our work and supervision. Hafford-Letchfield and Huss (2018) agree, stating that literature on social work supervision has consistently documented the impact of social work on the health and wellbeing of individual practitioners, along with the tensions they experience when mediating organisational demands and the needs of service users.

Patterson and Whincup (2017) and Munro (2011) elude that supervision has become more of a two-way process, where organisational culture and management style can influence the quality of practitioners' engagement with the people they work with. This can be detrimental to the practise of supervision, as social workers have more parties to consider but also less time and leeway to assist supervisees (Bourn & Hafford-Lechfield, 2011).

### **3.4.5 Cultural factors**

The manner in which supervision is arranged is subject to the social, cultural, organisational and professional practise in which it occurs (O'Donoghue, Wong Yuh Ju & Tsui, 2017). With South Africa being the "rainbow nation", it is important to include all cultures in all aspects of practise, which also applies to supervision. Engelbrecht (2014) speaks of the continuum of the cultural dimensions in social work, the one extreme being complete harmony and the other a battle zone. Either way, the continuum effects the practise of supervision and can either aid supervision or diminish it. These cultural factors should thus be identified and discussed.

As mentioned in the previous sections, cultural considerations are central to the wider environmental context for social work and should be reflected on in supervision (Rankine et

al., 2017). This can take the form of how one perceives gender differences, power in the work place and almost every other factor, as culture is engrained in every individual and becomes the lens through which we perceive the world. This lens would not be a problem if people could be more tolerant in society, but the challenge comes with the question of where does culture and character end and professional performance begin (Engelbrecht, 2019a). For example, the concept of African time implies that people from Africa work in their own time and are generally late. This can be seen as unprofessional in the work place, as well as having a negative impact on the supervision process as the resource of time is already so minimal. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that culture is the only driver, as all factors flow into one another as previously mentioned and the question does need to be asked: Is it culture that drives certain behaviours, or is it personality?

Engelbrecht (2014) thus poses a difficult question: Can you change a supervisee's work behaviour and patterns if it is not conducive to effective work performance? Even more so, can you change the behaviour if it is facilitating or causing harmful supervision? Or will changing behaviour based on culture be seen as harmful supervision? There are many cultural aspects that could affect supervision, including the difference in perception and execution of power, decision-making, time orientation, communication, approach to roles, space and gender (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Hofstede, 2001). Each of these aspects can influence supervision either negatively or positively. Thus, a shift towards constructive expertise and understanding of culture matches the need to cope with the ever-changing difficulties in everyday practices of the profession to ensure supervision is effective.

### **3.4.6 Generational dimension**

Today's society has an age-conscious social order in which perceptions of a widening generation gap and even wider-ranging generational conflict prevail. Stereotypes abound and undoubtedly influence individual opinions and their actions (MacManus & Turner, 2018). It is therefore important to understand the influence of generational gaps on supervision, as this will allow the social worker to flourish (Engelbrecht, 2019a).

O'Donoghue, Wong Yuh Ju and Tsui (2017) note that the way in which a supervisor was supervised can also play a role in how they supervise. If one comes from a more confrontational background where supervision was carried out in a "tough love manner", then one will also be hard on one's supervisee. On the other hand, if one comes from a softer and more person-centred supervision, one will more likely give this type of supervision. As mentioned

previously, other factors also influence generational patterns, and the above does not always occur. However, when such influences do take place, it is important to be a good example so that future generations also deliver effective supervision based on their personal experience, as many practitioners do not receive supervisory training. This issue will be discussed later.

Magnussen (2018) asserts that the supervisor is usually more qualified and experienced than the supervisee, meaning that experience might create a generational gap; not in every situation but most. Thus, it is important to understand that for each generation there is a particular perception and experience that moulds their preferences, expectations, beliefs and work styles. For instance, the difference between baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y/Z (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Wiedmer, 2015). Engelbrecht (2014) and Wiedmer (2015) extrapolate these generations in a loose way to depict the differences between each by stating that traditionalists from the 1960s, also known as baby boomers, differ immensely from the y/z generation (the 1980s and beyond) with regard to technology. Baby boomers may avoid or delegate digital technology work, whilst Generation Y/Z are digital natives. Generation X (from the 1960s to the 1980s) however is aware of the constant challenge to keep up with all technological advancements. These comparisons range over a variety of ideas, such as job stability and their outlook towards their contribution to the organisation. Additionally, within the South African context, generations before 1994 in the apartheid years experienced practise and supervision differently to those born post-apartheid. Although the generational gap might not be that great, the experiences and racial differences contribute to the shared experiences within the supervision relationship that undoubtedly play a role and could potentially contribute to harmful supervision based on race from a previous generation.

Generational gaps affect supervision and if not attended to could contribute to harmful supervision practise. For example: when a supervisor expects all reports to be done on paper, whilst the supervisee has been working digitally for their whole career, it may land up being harmful to the relationship and the supervision process. Or, a supervisor invests an immense amount of time leading and guiding a supervisee, with the expectation that they will remain and implement those changes in the organisation once the supervisor has left, yet Generation Y has a different take on lifelong jobs and commitment to an organisation. Therefore, generational gaps can influence supervision and if not acknowledged or accommodated could contribute to harmful supervision relationships or practises.

### 3.4.7 Adult education principles

This section will discuss adult education principles within the context of supervision. Adult education principles are a basis for supervisors to understand how supervisees need to learn. If not understood and applied however, this could potentially contribute to harmful supervision.

Adult education principles are relevant to supervision in terms of the fulfilment of the education function, as mentioned in chapter two. Social workers need to continue learning and supervision is a safe space where this occurs. Thus, it is crucial for supervisors to know how different individuals learn, and to apply that to supervision in order to avoid supervision becoming harmful or not fulfilling its learning function, and therefore being inadequate. McSweeney (2017) confirms this by pointing out the complexity of the teaching role and the importance of facilitating the practise of professional skills. Practitioners need to appreciate and be open to new learning, flexibility and adaptability. At the same time, they also need to acknowledge that people learn in different ways and should encourage supervisees to voice their ideas and assist them in developing plans for their personal and professional expansion (McSweeney, 2017).

Adult educational principles, as founded by Knowles (1971), expanded by Kudushin (1985) and then applied to the South African supervision context by Botha (2002) and Engelbrecht (2014) can be expounded as follows: Supervisees are autonomous and self-directed, they want to exercise choice and will only learn when they are motivated and enthusiastic. What this means is that supervisors need to encourage and motivate supervisees to ensure that learning is taking place within their organisations, with relevant and accurate knowledge. If the supervisor suppresses the supervisee's autonomy or does not encourage the supervisees, it is possible that learning will not take place and inadequate supervision will occur. Supervisees also learn best when they are enjoying the learning process and are goal orientated. These goals should be set out in the supervision contract and monitored throughout the supervisory relationship. Supervisees might also learn better in a relaxed environment, while feeling supported and not being judged. If however the learning environment is not a safe place and the supervisee feels judged, there will be a blockage in the supervisory relationship. Such a blockage is harmful to the process and functions of supervision, equating to harmful supervision. Supervisees also require supervisors to have a variety of teaching methods and strategies to fit the learning styles of the supervisee, and to make learning effective and not inadequate.



Therefore, adult education principles are essential to the supervisory relationship to ensure that supervisees are growing and learning within a safe environment while being motivated. If this is not the case and supervisees are stagnating, not learning, feeling threatened or not working towards a goal, then supervision becomes harmful and the supervisor is not fulfilling his or her role.

### **3.4.8 Learning styles**

The next section also links with learning, but will expound the learning styles that are important within the supervisory relationship. This is to ensure that supervisors understand how learning takes place in order to fulfil the education function of supervision.

Learning styles as depicted in social work supervision are generally based on the work of Kolb in the 1970s, though various styles have developed over the years. The initial four styles include convergence, divergence, assimilation and accommodates (Çolak, 2015; Engelbrecht, 2019a). Converters prefer to learn by practical application, which can be good for role playing in supervision but may also mean that initiative might be lacking in the supervisee. Diverges on the other hand prefer to see things from a different perspective, which can be helpful to supervision when fulfilling the supportive and educational functions of supervision, as discussed in chapter two, to ensure supervision is fulfilling its purpose. Assimilators prefer to abstractly conceptualise work through theoretical models. This is good from an education perspective, but could become harmful if blockages emerge with regard to theory application or even differentiation between specific theories. As mentioned previously, accommodators prefer to engage actively with reality, although this is not always possible within the learning function and supervision. Nevertheless, this can be helpful to bring clarity to the supervision and educational process.

Other learning styles include visual learning, auditory learning, reading-writing learning and kinaesthetic learning (Flemming & Mills, 1992). Grasha (1996) also developed a scale in this regard; however, these examples are situational patterns of learning behaviour, which can give the supervisor an indication of how to approach the supervisee to ensure that they do not cause harm in the supervision process. These include avoidant, participative, competitive, collaborative, dependant and independent, which give an indication of how to approach the supervisees' learning in order to match education strategies accordingly (Çolak, 2015; Engelbrecht, 2019a). If a supervisor within the supervisory relationship does not accommodate for the different learning styles it is unlikely that learning will take place in a positive



environment, if indeed it takes place at all. An aspect of the supervision functions is to educate supervisees, but if the supervisor does not accommodate the different learning styles and forces their type of learning on the supervisee, then education can become a harmful part of the supervisory relationship.

#### **3.4.9 Training institutions**

Another potential factor in terms of supervision could be the different training institutions of supervisors. The supervisor's formal education, training and particular methods utilised in supervision, or lack thereof, could potentially contribute to harmful supervision. Patterson and Whinecup (2017) assert that if supervisors are not adequately experienced and do not have enough support to perform their role, they will rely on osmosis to learn. However, this is not a pure form of supervision practise, as most organisations do not require supervisors to have any specific or formal training in supervision to become a supervisor. Akesson and Canavars (2017) agree that supervision tends to be learned on the job and that no formal qualification is needed. It is therefore notable that training is a gap in the supervision process, for without proper knowledge how can it be expected that supervision is effective and not harmful. Nevertheless, supervision is a professional practise and insufficient training should not be tolerated.

#### **3.4.10 Supervisory relationship**

There are various additional influences that link to the above-mentioned factors which could potentially lead to harmful supervision. These factors include the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. As stated by Magnussen (2018), a good relationship has positive outcomes, and a combination of education, experience and personality is key to handling this complex and ambiguous professional relationship, which happens to be an intrinsic part of supervision and a prerequisite for effectiveness. If the relationship is not strong however, then the focus easily moves more onto the management function and not onto the other functions and roles of the supervisor (O'Donoghue, Wong Yuh Ju & Tsui, 2017). Supervision can only be effective if there are working relationships with colleagues and professionals in an open and honest manner (Rankine et al., 2017). Thus, if a supervisory relationship is not healthy with a clear understanding of the above-mentioned factors along with clear communication, the relationship in itself can be seen as harmful supervision.

### **3.5 CONSEQUENCES OF HARMFUL SUPERVISION**

Humans are born with the potential to change and grow; our genetic potential however is shaped by environmental experiences (Trevithick, 2014). Consequently, harmful supervision

has the ability to shape the minds of social workers. This section will discuss the long- and short-term consequences of harmful supervision as well as a way forward to prevent this malpractice from happening.

Supervision may have many long- and short-term consequences on both supervisees and the profession itself. McNamara, Kangos, Corp, Ellis and Taylor (2017) describe how supervisees have felt intense negative emotions such as depression, anxiety and a sense of dread when entering into supervision. These significant psychological effects may also begin to affect the supervisee physically, including symptoms such as fatigue, weight loss, digestive issues, sleeplessness, recurrent illness, tearfulness, shaking and emotional exhaustion (Beddoe, 2017; Chan & McAllister, 2014; McNamara et al., 2017). These factors are distressing and personally harmful (Reiser & Milner, 2017), but also influence the organisation and service rendering as a whole. Chan and McAllister (2014) and Harris, Kacmar and Zivnuska (2007) agree that harmful supervision is linked to reduced employee work performance, which can manifest in undesirable behaviour at work that subsequently influences the organisation, other staff and clients (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017). These effects span as far as hindering the supervisees by derailing their professional development through persistent self-doubt (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017). This can also take the form of supervisees having extreme distrust and paranoia when it comes to supervision (Chan & McAllister, 2014).

Additionally, supervisees who have been exposed to harmful supervision practises are likely to affect other staff at the organisation, as they might practise harmful supervision on the staff they supervise and cultivate deteriorating relationships and paranoia (Chan & McAllister, 2014; Frost, 2003). Supervisees who have been exposed to harmful supervision may develop long-term bitterness and mistrust and thus struggle to work in a team (Chan & McAllister, 2014). McNamara, Kangos, Corp, Ellis and Taylor (2017) explain that another way in which staff are affected through harmful supervision is through victimisation, which is triggered by retaliatory responses of the first victim of harmful supervision (McNamara et al., 2017). These staff members who might be co-workers become convenient targets as they are less likely to retaliate when compared to supervisors (Mackey et al., 2016; McNamara et al., 2017). This is to be regarded as collateral damage and it is uncertain how far this extends within the organisation and ultimately the vulnerable service users. The traumatic stigmatisation, professional isolation and emotional trauma can cause a cognitive blocking (Beddoe, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017; Reiser & Milner, 2017) towards the profession and eventually cause social workers to leave the profession (Ellis et al., 2017).

To conclude, harmful supervision should never be tolerated or accepted. However, when it does occur there are a multitude of consequences that extend far beyond what is comprehensible, which chapter four will attempt to unveil. These damages influence the individual, the organisation, others within the organisation and the profession as a whole. For this reason, it is important that harmful supervision does not take place.

### **3.6 THE WAY FORWARD**

Although harmful supervision is negatively impacting the social service professions as discussed above, there are ways to rectify this harmful practise. The first way, according to Ammirati and Kaslow (2017), is to acknowledge that harmful supervision exists and that every current and future supervisor is capable of engaging in harmful supervision practises. This section will discuss various ways to move forward from harmful supervision and eradicate this practise from the profession.

The second way is by recognising that social workers should be experts in their field and that supervisors should also be experts of supervision. Therefore, education in the field of supervision should be improved and supervisors should become qualified in supervision (Eryilmaz & Mutlu, 2017). In so doing, this will alleviate wrongful practises being learned on the job, as supervisors will then be educated and can be held accountable for their actions. Additionally, providing effective supervision during the education phase of the supervisor's professional careers should be the cornerstone for supervisors to render better supervision when they are in practise (Aladağ, 2013; Cormier & Hackney, 2008; Eryilmaz & Mutlu, 2017). Lack of education is a central reason for harmful supervision and can be alleviated by advanced supervision research (Engelbrecht, 2019a), mandated professional requirement for post-training in supervision and a call for continuing professional development activities related to supervision (Creaner, 2014; Reiser & Milner, 2017). This may include training in supervision guidelines, ethical practice in supervision, effective and ineffective supervisory behaviours, ways to avoid harmful supervisory practices, competency-based and evidenced-based supervision models, and strategies for effectively resolving harmful situations if they arise (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017; Ellis, 2001; Falender & Shafranske, 2012; Ladany, Mori & Mehr, 2013; Milne, 2014; Milne & Reiser, 2012).

Parallel to this, supervisees should also be empowered through education in order to know what they should expect from supervision prior to them entering the supervisory relationship (McNamara et al., 2017). Supervisees should not be responsible for the type of supervision

they receive, but they should be empowered through education to know what they should not receive (Reiser & Milner, 2017). Supervisees also need to be empowered through new channels and legislation in order to report harmful supervision and be assigned new supervisors where appropriate (McNamara et al., 2017). Additional training of supervisees through their primary training programmes should focus on steps to addressing harmful supervision and ways to intervene if they witness or are part of such practises (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017). Training should also extrapolate finer details and not leave anything up to interpretation. This point is highlighted by Borders (2017), who articulates that the supervision contract should be so specific that it outlines the frequency and duration of supervision sessions, as well as an agreement that each supervision session will be based on either live observation/live supervision, audio recording or video recording to prevent harmful supervision, especially in the controlled training environments. Alternatively, to ensure that no harmful supervision is taking place, there should be no option other than to video record supervision sessions.

Furthermore, a culture of tolerance and openness should be cultivated in order to overcome harmful supervision. Pieterse (2018) outlines this concept by stating that “supervisors are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the supervisory experience is one of safety, acceptance, racial sensitivity, and racial affirmation”. Supervisees in turn need to be open to their experience as racial beings, and work through negative racial assumptions that impede their ability to fully enter the supervisory experience with openness and vulnerability. This implies that being transparent regarding self-awareness, cultural sensitivities and racial competence within supervision can improve the supervisory relationship and potentially eradicate harmful supervision.

The way forward in eradicating harmful supervision in social work can be improved by following a stringent education and research approach to improving training at grass roots level. However, it is still important to improve and correct current supervisors by implementing lifelong learning and continual professional development. Supervisees should not accept harmful supervision and should speak out in order for this practise to be removed.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this chapter discussed several potential factors that could potentially be harmful to the supervision relationship and process. It is important to realise that none of these factors can be seen in isolation and that they all have an influence on one another. Supervision is crucial for effective service delivery, hence if the problem of harmful supervision can be

solved, then social workers can render more effective services. The following chapter will look into potential factors contributing to harmful supervision in practise and may identify others as well.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EMPIRICAL STUDY ON POTENTIAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HARMFUL SUPERVISION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter looked at the theoretical underpinning of harmful supervision and defining the practise thereof. This chapter will fulfil the third objective of the study, which is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of social workers regarding their observations of the factors contributing to harmful supervision in social work. The findings based on the 20 participants' views will be presented in this chapter using graphs, tables, themes, sub-themes and categories where applicable. As previously mentioned, the majority of factors are interlinked and cannot be seen as separate entities. This is also true for the narratives collected during the interview process.

#### **SECTION A**

This section will provide an outline of the research methodology that was utilised throughout the study on the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers. The research methodology was discussed comprehensively in chapter one.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section will outline the research approach, research design, sampling methods, data collection and data analysis utilised for the study on the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers.

##### **4.2.1 Research approach**

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study as it is predominantly used to answer questions about complex phenomena (Fouché & Delport, 2011). Qualitative research also seeks to understand the phenomena from the participants' points of view (Fouché & Delport, 2011) and allows for flexibility in all aspects of the research process (Kumar, 2005). By using this approach, the researcher was able to gather in-depth and personal answers from the participants through the questions posed and by probing in order to understand the complexities of the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers. By using a mixture of inductive and deductive research approaches (Engel & Schutt, 2014), the researcher was able to conceptualise the research problem and link it to existing theory and

further extrapolate specific experiences contributing to the harmful supervision of social workers.

#### **4.2.2 Research design**

The research design utilised for this study was exploratory and descriptive. An exploratory research design is often used to identify the general terrain of a topic or problem area in the primary stages of research and forms a part of the initial sequence of studies, where the objective is to reach a basic goal within the research (Alson & Bowles, 2003; Fouché & de Vos, 2011). By using an exploratory research design, the researcher was able to allow participants to broadly share their experiences and perceptions, thereby permitting other factors not already mentioned to be included in the study. Additionally, the researcher utilised the descriptive research design to answer questions such as how and why (Fouché & de Vos, 2011; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006), leading to a more intense examination of the potential factors contributing to the harmful supervision of social workers. By combining the two approaches, the researcher was able to explore many different factors and experiences whilst still obtaining rich and dense narratives from the participants.

#### **4.2.3 Sampling methods**

For the purpose of this study, purposive-snowball sampling was utilised. Carey (2012) suggests that snowball sampling occurs when a researcher begins with one or two participants and then builds their sample by moving to others who are recommended. This was suited to the study, as one of the criteria for inclusion required the researcher to select participants who had knowledge on supervision. This form of sampling is used when there is lack of knowledge or information about the sampling frame and limited access to the appropriate participants for the intended study (Alston & Bowels, 2003). This was appropriate, as the researcher was not addressing a certain organisation or phenomena that was limited to one area, form or practice of social work, but rather supervision across many different organisations and fields of social work. By using snowball sampling, the researcher was able to be referred to colleagues within certain organisations and then on to other professionals. Accordingly, the researcher was able to note that some organisations place great importance on supervision, as evident in their correct practise of supervision, whilst other do not. This highlights that the organisation sets the tone for supervision; however, if they do not find it important, it will not be carried out correctly.

This method of sampling has been utilised based on the following criteria for inclusion:

- Social workers with a minimum of a year's experience, in order to ensure that the social workers have had sufficient exposure to social work supervision in practise;
- Employed either by the state or private welfare organisations, as the research is not bound to a specific organisation;
- Must have received any form of supervision in their professional capacity, in order for the perceptions of the social workers to be accurate and relevant to supervision;
- Be proficient in English, as the interviews were conducted in this language.

The sample for this study included 20 participants who are social workers. These 20 participants allowed for data saturation as the same themes were identified (Guest et al., 2006). As Carey (2012) states, the focus should be on the quality of data collection and not on the quantity thereof.

The researcher contacted professionals fitting the criteria for inclusion in their personal professional capacity through email and telephone calls. The data collection process took five months and was limited to the Western Cape. Once the researcher had obtained the first participant, snowball sampling was utilised to request the participant for referrals of additional social workers who also meet the criteria for inclusion. Most participants were eager to participate and did not mind using their lunch break to talk to the researcher. Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants, who were also informed about the study and were reminded that they could withdraw at any point (see Annexure 1). The interviews went smoothly and no participants experienced any trouble within the interview process. The researcher did however have to explain a few concepts to most participants.

#### **4.2.4 Data collection**

A semi-structured interview method was utilised for this study, which means that the interviews were organised around certain areas of particular interest (Greef, 2011). This method was selected for the researcher to acquire a detailed picture of the participants' perceptions and experiences of harmful supervision. This data collection method allowed for a more flexible environment between the researcher and the participants and the freedom to follow avenues of interest to the researcher (Greef, 2011). For this study, a voice recorder was used to audio tape the interviews after consent from participants was obtained. Thereafter, these interviews were transcribed. Field notes were also made during interviews to assist the researcher with the analysis of the interviews in order to identify themes and probe into areas where the participants



had experience or thoughts of harmful supervision. The flexibility of the semi-structured approach allowed for the researcher to probe in order to gather rich data from the participants during data collection. Probing was based on an interview constructed around themes and subthemes, as can be seen in the interview schedule (Annexure 2). The researcher did not follow the structure rigidly and discovered that if an experience was going in the direction of a theme, the researcher would probe into that theme and experience to fully understand the context. This worked well, as the researcher was able to discover more in-depth details. Findings from this data collection will be presented in this chapter.

#### **4.2.5 Data analysis**

The data analysis process is essentially an attempt to better explain and understand research findings by extracting meaning (Carey, 2012). After the 20 interviews had been conducted, the point of data saturation was reached and the process of data analysis commenced. The first step was to transcribe the data that was tape recorded, which was done through a denaturalised approach (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005) where the focus is more on the content rather than how it was said. In view of this, involuntary actions and repetition of words which appear habitual were all removed during transcription. Grammar was corrected where needed to give a clear understanding of the information provided by the participants. It must be noted that this was done with extra caution to avoid changing the meanings and interpretations given by participants regarding their situations. The transcripts were then read and the data was extracted manually and placed into relevant themes, sub-themes and categories. Some themes were based on and in the same order as the questions in the interview schedule, but the sub-themes and categories were generated from the participant discourses. The researcher selected certain narratives to represent the trends that were discovered after transcribing the interviews.

The researcher will now compare the findings to existing data in the section to follow.

## **SECTION B**

This section will present characteristics of the participants involved in the empirical study on the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers.

### **4.3 CONTEXTUAL PARTICULARS OF PARTICIPANTS**

The contextual particulars of the study participants will be discussed below to create context around the participants with regard to their years of experience, working environment and their supervision context.

#### 4.3.1 Years of experience as a social worker

The years of experience of the participants are visually represented in the box and whiskers chart below.

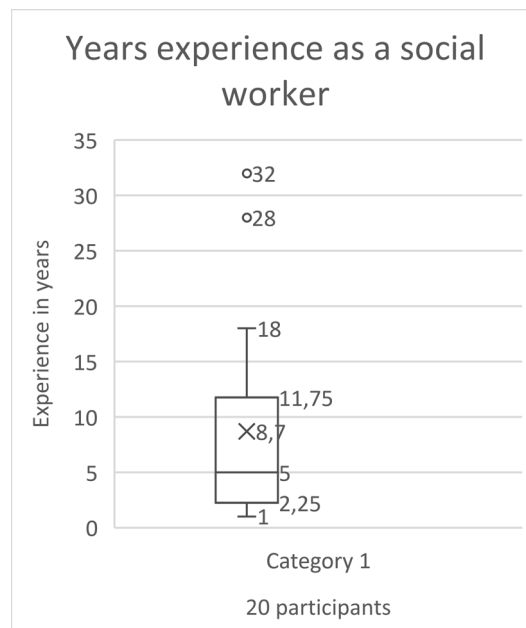


Figure 4.3.1 Years' experience as a social worker

The above figure shows the average years of experience of the 20 participants. The vertical axis depicts the years, whilst the horizontal axis displays the 20 participants in one chart. The middle box shows that the average years of experience among the participants was just over eight years, while the majority of participants ranged between two and eleven years' experience as social workers, as can be seen by the larger box. Although the criteria for inclusion in the study was working as a social worker for only one year, all the participants have a vast amount of experience, having worked for much longer than just a year within this field. This indicates that these social workers are intermediate social workers, being knowledgeable and skilled practitioners who have worked in different eras of social work, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of supervision across the different years and making them excellent informants. Engelbrecht (2019a) agrees that social workers with extensive experience are aware of work-related strengths, challenges and opportunities to continue education. However, he also states that intermediate practitioners may be ambivalent about the need for supervision as they have more confidence in their ability than a social worker who is just starting out. It is therefore important to consider the wide context of the narratives to follow based on the extensive experience of the participants.

### 4.3.2 Working environment

The pie chart below is a representation of the participants' sectors of social work practise.

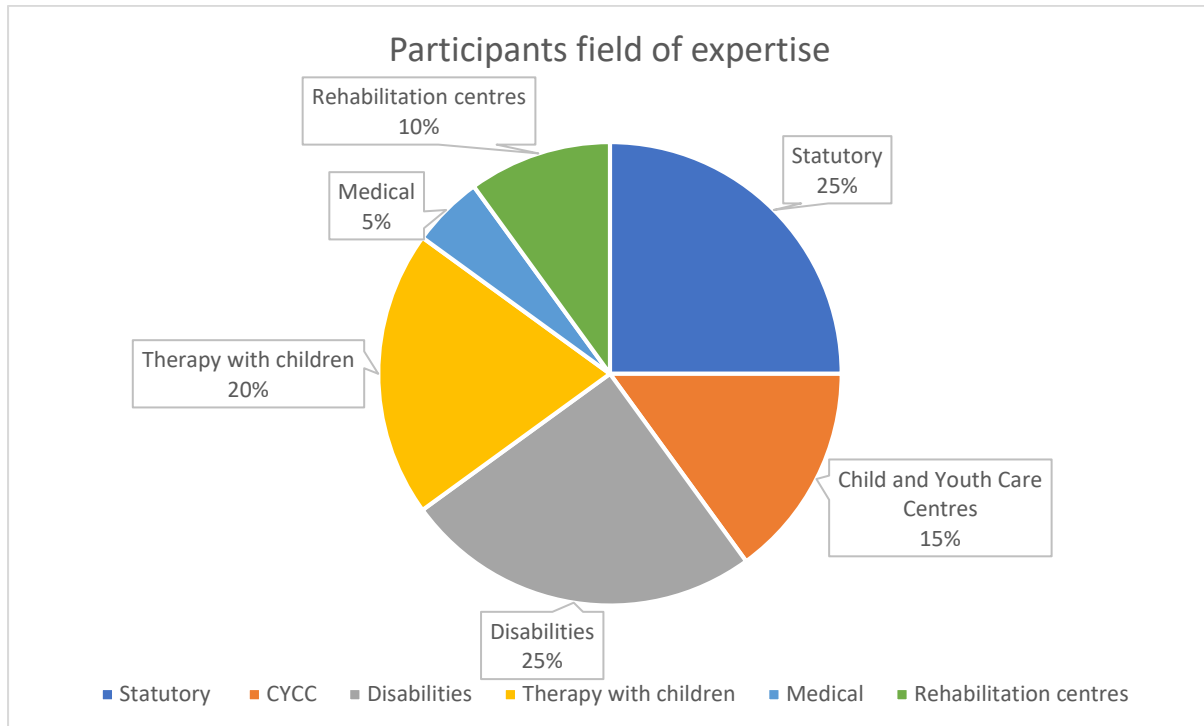


Figure 4.3.2 Participants' field of expertise

As can be seen in the pie chart above, there are various fields of expertise amongst the participants. Child and youth care centres entailed participants who work with children in residential facilities, either in a therapy environment or in the planning and executing of the residents' lives. The reason for 15% of the participants coming from child and youth care centres, all of which are NGOs, is because the first participant selected referred to other child and youth care centres in the area. Once the researcher contacted a participant from the next organisation, the participant then referred the researcher to colleagues within their child and youth care centre. This is to be expected with snowball sampling, as the participants refer the researcher to other participants in various related demographic areas and fields of expertise. A total of 25% of the participants came from a disability organisation, who referred the researcher to colleagues of theirs across the Western Cape. The next 35% was also comprised of NGOs, including rehabilitation centres working with substance abuse, a social worker working in the medical field in a psychiatric hospital and practitioners in private practise doing play therapy with children. All the participants mentioned formed a part of NGOs, which the researcher found to be a simpler process when approaching and setting a time with for an interview. However, when interviewing statutory workers, most of whom came from an NGO

environment and were easy to contact, the researcher discovered that those who came from government organisations were extremely difficult to contact and to set a date and time for an interview. The researcher was frequently turned away when approaching government institutions, some of whose social workers even stated that they would not be allowed to partake in any interviews. What is interesting to note is that participants outside of the statutory field distinguished that social workers within the statutory field require the most support, yet often receive the least support and supervision, as can be seen in the narratives below:

**Participant 3:** *“You need growth and feedback, to put theory into practice. Especially in statutory work. Like they think they need forms for court and then the judge says no it's wrong. It's not always that effective. So after speaking to other people I realise I am very fortunate.”*

**Participant 4:** *“With statutory work there is a constant need for guidance, and without supervision they are getting burned out. I think there is a lack of supervision specifically in \*\*\*\*<sup>1</sup> where they do statutory work.”*

A participant with 5 years' experience in the statutory field had the following to say:

**Participant 16:** *“There's not even time and they..., honestly there's no time. Supervision is like a waste of time, like you don't have time to sit in supervision and discuss [referring to the high caseload] ...For me personally because I think of the type of my personality, and my work ethic is quite strong. So I didn't always require supervision but I would pass things by her, just informally, we would chat, and that is what it becomes in an open plan.”*

However, when reflecting on one of the newer workers at her office, the same participant said:

*“Child protection is very challenging. And you can see, like I swear this one colleague is going to have a stroke, like she has Rescue Remedy's and stuff on her desk. Like her eyes start flapping when she doesn't know which way to go, like she shuts down completely as soon as there's a crisis... But if there was proper supervision, and she gets the most supervision I must say, she gets the most supervision because she demands it. But the level of supervision that she's getting, I'm not sure how effect, it doesn't seem like it's very effective.”*

It is known to social workers in South Africa that there are high caseloads and few workers working in child protection and statutory services. Thus, it is understandable that the participants inside and outside of the statutory sector have noted the need for supervision and

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<sup>1</sup> The organisation's name was mentioned, but to protect the organisation's identity the researcher has blotted it out.

the lack thereof for social workers. Now that the context of expertise has been highlighted, the narratives can be seen within the bounds of different areas of expertise.

### 4.3.3 Supervision of participants

One of the first questions posed to each participant was: “Are you currently receiving supervision?” This question was asked before any harmful factors were mentioned and was intended to be a closed-ended question with a yes or no answer. However, as the study progressed it was evident that many participants answered yes to receiving supervision but did not fully understand the true definition of supervision. This will be discussed further under the question: “Do you think your supervision is more harmful or helpful to you?”

The figure below presents a breakdown of which participants are currently receiving supervision, consultation or nothing at all.

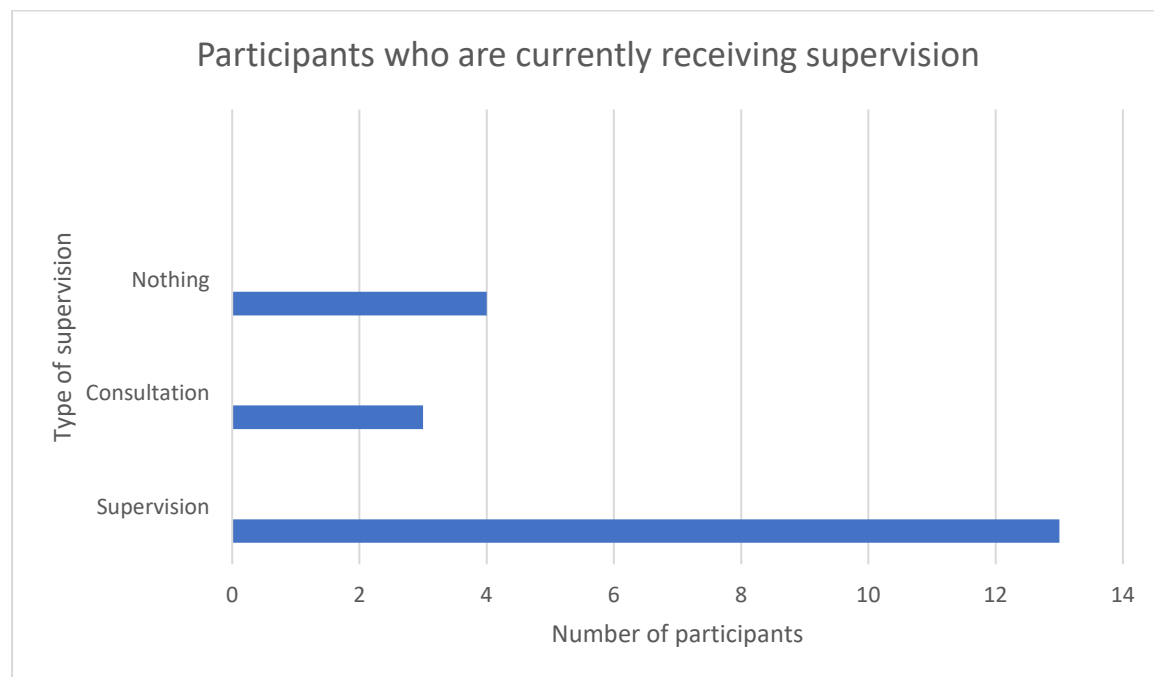


Figure 4.3.3 Participants who are currently receiving supervision

The above figure depicts that 13 of the participants are receiving supervision, while three are receiving consultation; the latter being an activity of supervision determined by the supervision contract and performance appraisal after the goals and outcomes of supervision in the initial contract are achieved (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Lastly, four of the participants are currently receiving nothing at all. As established in chapter three, those who are not receiving supervision are in a harmful practise, while with those who are receiving supervision there might potentially be factors within the supervision process contributing to harmful supervision, as to be discussed

in the following section. Participants who are receiving consultation should only be in this position if they are professionally matured, autonomous practitioners who have achieved all the goals and outcomes of their initial supervision contracts (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). Participant 1 has been in practise for one year and says she receives consultation, as elaborated below:

**Participant 1:** *“Well, consultation with our supervisor depends on her... personality, and maybe her position also as CEO so she will maybe focus more on... is work being done. More are you coping with your tasks, not to put a bad light on her but there is not a lot of talk about wellness or am I coping.”*

The researcher then asked the participant if she had any professional development goals, to which she responded:

*“Not necessarily goals, more like what is your need for the moment. And what we each want to discuss with one another.”*

As can be inferred from the narratives above, the participant is a new social worker in the field and has not achieved any supervision goals as she does not have any. The participant emphasised the need for support, which indicates that she is not yet ready to be on consultation and should still be receiving supervision within its full functions of education, support and administration, as consultation is meant for guidance for experienced autonomous practitioners. Although the participant states that her consultation focuses on whether the work is being done, the Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) notes that consultation is not focussed on administrative control as it of an advisory nature. Thus, it is important to note that inadequate supervision, incorrect consultation and no supervision at all contribute to the harmful practise of supervision in social work, as will be discussed in the following section.

## SECTION C

The previous section discussed demographics and contextual information. Section C will present the appropriate themes and sub-themes relating to the data collected from the participants who took part in the study on potential factors contributing to the harmful supervision of social workers.

#### 4.4 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

As can be seen in the table below, five initial themes were identified, followed by the sub-themes and categories. These themes, sub-themes and categories were identified from the participants' narratives.

Theme	Sub-themes	Categories
Theme 1: Supervision processes	Professionalism as a factor	Frequency
		Agenda and records of supervision sessions
		Contracts, goals and professional development
	Sufficient support as a factor	
Theme 2: Functions of supervision	Administration	
	Support	
	Education	
Theme 3: Relationship with supervisor	Interaction	
	Power	
	Generation	
	Gender	
Theme 4: Working environment	Organisational culture	
	Structural issues	
Theme 5: Harmfulness or helpfulness of supervision	Is supervision harmful or helpful?	Personal experience
		General perceptions of supervision
	Other factors contributing to harmful supervision	

Table 4.4 Themes, sub-themes and categories

The researcher made use of themes and subthemes throughout the processing of the narratives; however, categories were only identified when the themes were multifaceted. The researcher

has presented the above table before the discussion of each theme in order to understand the respective theme being deliberated.

### THEME 1: SUPERVISION PROCESSES

Theme	Sub-themes	Categories
Supervision processes	Professionalism as a factor	Frequency
		Agenda and records of supervision sessions
		Contracts, goals and professional development
	Sufficient support as a factor	

Table 4.4.1: Supervision processes

#### 4.4.1 Theme 1: Supervision processes

In this section, the participants were asked specifically about their supervision sessions and if the supervision they received was sufficient to deal with the stress of their job.

##### 4.4.1.1 Professionalism as a factor

In this section, the participants were asked about their supervision sessions, frequency, records, supervision contracts, professional development within supervision and if they could briefly run the researcher through a supervision session. From this, the following categories arose:

##### 4.4.1.1.1 Frequency of supervision

When asked the above-mentioned question, some participants indicated that supervision generally happens monthly. However, there are various factors, such as the supervisor being busy or having to be in court that would hinder the frequency of supervision. The majority of participants stated that they feel open enough to approach their supervisor with an open-door policy, as can be seen in the narratives below.

**Participant 6:** “So she's got, like an open-door policy where if I'm struggling with a specific client I can sort of hop in and just ask her a question about it, yeah.”

**Participant 12:** “Where you can just pop in like an open-door policy, and say this is what's going on can I get your advice? There might not be such a big need for every week's supervision.”



**Participant 14:** *“Because we have such an open-door policy, the scheduled time is more for the care part of supervision. Where the open-door is always there, because there's consistently e-mails and admin of checking in and checking in on files.”*

**Participant 18:** *“...but working at the NGO it is not always possible to go for individual supervision on that specific time but we do get. We can walk in whenever we need something or want to speak to the supervisor about anything.”*

The narratives depict that this type of open-door supervision is indeed taking place. Nevertheless, whilst it is good to have a positive relationship with one's supervisor and be able to obtain immediate assistance on cases, it is imperative that this open-door supervision does not replace mandatory structured supervision. As can be noted by the words “pop in” and “hop in”, these sessions are quick and are centred on one specific question, as can be seen in the narratives. Chibaya (2018) states that an open-door policy can be equated to what Noble and Irwin (2009:351) call “on the run” supervision. This form of supervision places emphasis on the execution of tasks (Bourn & Hafford-Letchfield, 2011) rather than on completing the triad of supervisory functions within a standardised supervision session. The Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012:33) mandates supervision during the first year of practice to be at least every second week, after which the frequency may be contracted to at least once a month. Despite this, it can be seen in the narratives that first-year social workers are receiving consultation, even though they should be receiving supervision. This type of practice should be regarded as inadequate supervision, because it does not operationalise the definition of supervision and should not even be called supervision per se, as suggested in chapter three.

#### **4.4.1.1.2 Agenda and reports of supervision sessions**

During the interview, participants were asked about their supervision context in order to gain insight regarding the basis of the supervision relationship and what could potentially be causing harmful supervision. This question was followed by various probing questions, one of which was whether or not the supervisor and the supervisee have an agenda for supervision and if they keep reports of each supervision session. Whilst few of the participants had official agendas for each supervision session, most described what they addressed in supervision, as can be seen in the narratives below:

**Participants 14:** *“So if there's a case discussion that needs to be done... our structured supervision is more about emotional support, just to check in and, are you still in line with what you want to do, where you should be.”*

**Participant 3:** *“The supervisor has their points that they want to talk to you about, look at your files give comments or feedback that they get from management. Also, an opportunity for me to ask questions.”*

Having an agenda is crucial for the development of the professional relationship and process of supervision, as it sets goals and boundaries for the session. The Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) explains that the agenda needs to be mutually generated for both supervisor and supervisee to engage in supervisory interaction. As can be seen in the narratives, if there is no agenda only certain functions or topics will be discussed in supervision, allowing for harmful supervision practise by not including administration, support, education and the tasks that flow from these functions. Hence, supervision without an agenda is inadequate supervision, as the triad of functions are not being fulfilled. Consequently, inadequate supervision is harmful supervision and does not enable the supervisee to become an autonomous practitioner and in turn render effective services to service users.

The Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) speaks of supervision sessions that should be structured, planned and have specific goals linked to professional development, with an agenda and written report signed by both supervisor and supervisee (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Tsui, 2005). The narratives however show that the majority of participants find the process of supervision to be futile and only done in practice to tick a box.

**Participant 6:** *“\*\*\*\*\*<sup>2</sup> requires that my supervisor hands in supervision notes, okay. We had a really big problem with that in our office because I'm talking about personal stuff.”*

**Participant 6** continues to say:

*“So, the records, she types them up, I read through them and then I sign them and send them back to her. It's a waste of time for everybody involved. It's just ... it's a one-page thing that she has to type. She keeps written records of it on, like a file there, but it's just to me, it's a waste. I'd rather have supervision where I'm not having to worry about, oh, I didn't sign this form or I didn't write this down, like it's just stupid.”*

Participant six describes the supervision processes as hindering her supervision sessions due to external auditing bodies reading what is discussed in supervision and, in addition, because of the pressure to record everything down in order to tick the administrative box of these external

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<sup>2</sup> Organisation's name was mentioned, but to protect the organisation's its identity the researcher has blotted it out.

bodies. The Supervision Framework (SACSSP & DSD, 2012) extrapolates under its norms and standards that records of every social worker's personal development plan, supervision contract, reports and performance appraisals should be kept and be available for monitoring and evaluation by relevant authorities. Whilst there should be confidentiality within audits from these regulatory bodies, it is important for supervisees to feel protected within supervision, as when they do not feel protected the relationship is not serving a helpful purpose and could be harmful. This touches more on a structural issue, which will be discussed later. Supervision notes need to be kept serving as proof of goals, discussions and changes made within the supervision session. If, however, these crucial aspects are not being discussed, the process notes can be seen as pointless. The process note should be used as a measure in order to be accountable to the functions, goals and tasks of the supervisory relationship. If there are no tasks and goals, then supervision and reporting on the sessions is not fulfilling the purpose of supervision to educate, support and grow the supervisee. In this way, it causes harm to the development of the supervisee, which is a factor contributing to harmful supervision.

#### **4.4.1.1.3 Contracts and professional development**

In the beginning phases of supervision, a contract should be set with an agenda, frequency and personal development goals (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Tsui, 2005) based on the 13 determinants of Engelbrecht (2019a). The importance of these aspects was discussed previously and all link back to the supervision contract. Whilst most supervisees had supervision contracts, when probed about the importance or contents of these contracts the following was said:

**Participant 6:** *"We made one because Department of Social Development made us make one."*

**Participant 17:** *"I didn't read it to be honest, I just signed it."*

Brashears (1995) and Engelbrecht (2019a) agree that contracting in supervision occurs in the initial phase of the supervisory relationship and is of importance to all additional goals, tasks and functions of supervision, as it sets the tone for the rest of the relationship. However, as can be seen in the narrative, the first stages of the supervisory relationship and the initial agreements are not set at high importance, but rather because participants have been told to do it or know to sign these as a norm. This is not only disconcerting, but also brings to light that the contracts are not being implemented, because if they were, supervisees would take more care in signing them as there would be repercussions when not completing agreed-upon goals/tasks. Supervisors are the experts in the field (Reiser & Milner, 2017) and should ensure that

supervision contracts are signed with caution and implemented throughout the supervision relationship. Authors (Reiser & Milner, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017) also note that not having a supervision contract should be an early alert of harmful supervision practises. Similarly, not being held accountable to the contract should be seen as inadequate supervision, which was established in chapter three as harmful supervision. This careless practise of supervision not only opens the door to other harmful practises in the supervisory relationship, but sets the tone for the less experienced supervisees that the goals and functions of supervision are not important.

#### **4.4.1.2 Sufficient support as a factor**

The social work profession is especially unpredictable, non-routine, non-standardised, highly individualised and imperceptible in nature, according to Botha (2002). Due to this, supervision can also be seen as an occasion to receive and seek emotional support for the demanding, volatile and stressful role of being a social worker (Carpenter et al., 2015). Participants were asked if they have enough support to deal with the caseload and stress of the job. Their responses are presented below:

**Participant 5:** *“If you don't go look for it [support] it won't be there.”*

**Participant 10:** *“I don't think there will ever be enough... It feels like this is the nature of the beast.”*

**Participant 11:** *“No I don't think so... and there were times when I felt threatened and I felt there wasn't enough support from the supervisor or for the organisation as a whole.”*

**Participant 19:** *“No, it's not. No, I don't think it's enough.”*

Due to the high caseload and stress of the job, social workers require sufficient support to ultimately render the best services to the client. However, as can be seen in the narratives above, the participants do not feel supported, which is a harmful practise of supervision that has detrimental effects to the social workers and service users alike. Magnussen (2018) agrees that the reason for high turnover rates is because the workload is overwhelming, social workers are not always protected, and the supervision they receive is not sufficient to deal with the stress of practise (McNamara et al., 2017; Porath & Pearson, 2010). This can also lead to workers experiencing burnout (Wagaman, Geiger & Shockley, 2015). Burnout also decreases job performance, increases absenteeism and heightens turnover rates, which decreases the effectiveness of services rendered to clients (Wagaman, Geiger & Shockley, 2015). Therefore,

workers' performance and turnover rates need to be considered within the support they receive in supervision with correlation towards workloads and resources (O'Donoghue, 2003).

## THEME 2: FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISION

Theme	Sub-themes
Functions of supervision	Administration
	Support
	Education

Table 4.4.2: Functions of supervision

### 4.4.2 Theme 2: The functions of supervision

In this section, participants were asked to describe their perception of the harmfulness/helpfulness of supervision functions in their supervision. Most participants required probing by explaining that the functions are administration, education and support.

#### 4.4.2.1 Administration

The researcher broke down the question of the participants' perceptions and asked if the participants handled administrative tasks within the supervision sessions they received. The narratives were as follows:

**Participant 12:** *“Well, definitely not admin [in supervision] because they didn't know what I did on a daily basis... we came from different organisations and met up for group supervision, like it was outsourced.”*

Participant 12 comes from a group supervision environment that was outsourced, as she is the only social worker at her organisation. Whilst this form of supervision was sufficient according to her organisation, as can be seen in her narratives, it does not fulfil the administration function of supervision. The Supervision Framework (SACSSP & DSD, 2012:25) states that: “the administrative function's primary focus is on the correct, effective and appropriate implementation of agency policies and procedures.” Whilst this can be dictated in various tasks such as checking on reports, reviewing and evaluating work, coordinating work, communicating (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014) and conducting spot checks on case files, group supervision is intended to supplement individual supervision (SACSSP & DSD, 2012) and not replace it. The Supervision Framework (SACSSP & DSD, 2012) also states that caution must

be given to group supervision to ensure that practitioners are not too diverse in practise or experience. Considering the participants statements that “they do not know what I do”, it is suspected that the other supervisees and potentially even the supervisor come from different fields of expertise. Although defaulting on administration can occur in different ways, including blatantly ignoring it, the example mentioned above neglects the administrative function as it was impossible to do this in an outsourced group work setting. However, the fact remains that if the administrative function of supervision is neglected, regardless of the reason why, this negligence then contributes to harmful supervision practise.

In contrast, Du Brun (2012) highlights the importance of administration measuring the real work performance of employees against a predetermined standard, with the purpose of taking corrective action if there is significant difference. However, if supervisors overemphasise this function, it can be equally as harmful, as seen below:

**Participant 7:** *“I think sometimes it can be harmful when it's mainly just like an administrative thing. So you're just, like going through, like reports or deadlines.”*

**Participant 14:** *“So there's consistently e-mails and admins are checking in and checking in on files. So the administration part or planning, we have weekly planning for the whole office to say, what's happening, and what are everybody's schedules.”*

**Participant 17:** *“We do a lot of administration. Like these are all the files that I've just wrote, termination reports for yesterday and now when we have supervision again she'll terminate that. We'll talk about current cases that need attention; things that need to get done.”*

While a lack of the administration function is harmful, too much emphasis on this function plays into the hands of managerial ideologies where the emphasis is on efficiency and not quality (Lewis, Packard & Lewis, 2007). Earlier narratives spoke of open-door policy supervision that only focused on admin or tasks relating to a new problem or situations. These are good examples of supervision only focusing on administration because of time constraints, which has been determined to be harmful. Similarly, if an entire session of supervision is predominantly focused on administration as noted in the narratives above, supervision is inadequate and harmful and can also become managerial. This will be discussed in detail in a theme to follow.

#### **4.4.2.2 Support**

In addition to the question on overall support to the participants, the researcher also probed into the supportive function of supervision within the supervision sessions. The participants' responses are presented below:

**Participant 2:** *"I feel supported, and my supervisor has a lot of experience, more than me... You feel like you are growing and learning."*

**Participant 3:** *"Yes, she was the coordinator before me, so I feel supported because she knows."*

The narratives present that growth and professional development occur when supervisees feel supported within the supervision relationship. Moreover, the service users also benefit from well-supported supervisees, as such supervisees are likely to render more effective and efficient services to service users (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). In noting the benefit of supervision, it is easy to see that a lack in support is a harmful practise of supervision, as can be seen in the narratives below:

**Participant 5:** *"But the support can be more, it's the one that lacks the personal support."*

**Participant 6:** *"In terms of support, zero, I had no support, just nothing. But I think, like I said, hating your supervisor brought everybody else together so then everybody else was super supportive."*

**Participant 16:** *"But the level of support and the other stuff... It just, yeah, it wasn't there, not so much."*

**Participant 17:** *"She asks me at the beginning of each supervision, how are you? But sometimes it feels more like a formality than really like, how are you, like how are you really?... And if I say, I'm not doing that well, like I'm quite anxious. It almost feels like there's not much focus on, why and how can we help you? It's sort of like, oh, you know, shame, okay, I hope you feel better quickly, like it's not heartfelt support."*

When supervisees are not genuinely supported or supported at all within the supervision relationship, as noted in the narratives above, there are detrimental effects on the morale, job satisfaction and quality of work of supervisees (Kadushin, 1992; Hawkins & Shohet, 2007). Consequences of low job satisfaction lead to high turnover rates because the workload is



overwhelming (Magnussen, 2018). Thus, when support is not provided to supervisees it can be seen as harmful supervision, as provided in the definition in chapter three.

#### **4.4.2.3 Education**

Lastly, the researcher probed regarding the education function by asking if the supervision sessions focused on this function. The narratives on education are presented below:

**Participant 7:** *“I'd say education not so much. So, I don't receive, I wouldn't say I receive education in supervision but if there's training that I require, she's supportive of that and I could seek it elsewhere.”*

**Participant 9:** *“I think there's times where I get assistance in terms of the education stuff and can ask, even if it's not for her to give the assistance but then to be referred for training and whatever, there's that.”*

**Participant 17:** *“There's no focus on education or, like any theory or any kind of book or learning technique or whatever. Like I would tell her, like remember when I went for this training that I like organised for myself... So, education, non-existent.”*

By executing the associated tasks of the education function within the supervision relationship and process, supervisees not only grow into successful, effective and efficient practitioners, but also experience job satisfaction (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Magnussen, 2018; Engelbrecht, 2019a; Carpenter et al., 2015). The Supervision Framework (SACSSP & DSD, 2012) highlights the importance of this function by stating that the primary goal of the education function is to improve knowledge and skills of the supervisee in order for them to be empowered to execute their duties well. The Supervision Framework (SACSSP & DSD, 2012) also emphasises that this function should be distinguished from staff development programmes and in-service training, unlike the narratives presented above. Whilst it is good that supervisors are outsourcing education in line with professional development certifications, this is not sufficient in itself as learning needs to take place in supervision too. Similarly, not receiving any learning in supervision is just as harmful (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017), as can be seen from the narrative of participant 17.

In chapter three, the researcher discussed a spectrum defining inadequate and harmful supervision practises. Based on Ammirati and Kaslow (2017), inadequate supervision was defined by the supervisor not fulfilling the triad of functions and responsibilities associated with supervision. As can be seen in the narratives, the overarching factor through theme 2 is



that, while supervisees at first sight might not see the harm of the inadequate practise of supervision, they do go on to see the detrimental effects. Engelbrecht (2010) elucidates that there will be times when one of the functions are emphasised at particular stages in the supervisory relationship. However, it should never be tolerated that only some or none of the functions are being fulfilled.

### THEME 3: RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPERVISOR

Theme	Sub-themes
Relationship with supervisor	Interaction
	Power
	Generation
	Gender

Table 4.4.3: Relationship with the supervisor

#### 4.4.3 Theme 3: Relationship with supervisor

The participants were asked how they see their relationship with their supervisor, starting with their interaction within the professional relationship, power relations and generational differences, and whether gender plays a role within the relationship.

##### 4.4.3.1 Interaction within the supervisory relationship

The researcher asked the participants about their professional relationship, probing through examples of how they interact, if they respect their supervisor and if there is a sense of professionalism within the supervisory relationship. Some of the participants stated that they have a good relationship with their supervisor and that it is more an informal but professional construct. However, some participants narrated the following:

**Participant 3:** “Yes we get along quite well, so we see each other after office hours...we are good friends as well so we will see each other as friends.”

**Participant 5:** “Some of them are also my friends.”

**Participant 16:** “Personally, I had a good relationship with her. So there was that level of respect, as she's my superior but also like friends. Like I mean, we went on a weekend away together, that's the type of team dynamic that we have.”

Supervision is a process between two people in a professional, participatory and respectful relationship which promotes ongoing learning (Farkas-Cameron, 1995; Beinart, 2012; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). However, when the professional relationship crosses those professional boundaries, as can be seen above, there are various aspects that can be harmful to the supervisory relationship. The harmful component of being “friends” within the supervisory relationship or having a weak supervision style, by chatting and crossing professional boundaries on an emotional level within supervision, is that the space is removed for all aspects of supervision (Beddoe, 2017). Whilst talking about one’s weekend plans is lower on the spectrum of harmful supervision, crossing professional boundaries by having sexual relations or using drugs with supervisees (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017) is what such unprofessionalism can lead to. Being unprofessional within the supervision relationship detracts from the professional status of social work supervision (Engelbrecht, 2019a) and ultimately can harm the quality of services to social service users. While being too friendly is one type of professional boundary crossed, seeing the supervisee as a child also constitutes crossing professional boundaries, as can be seen below:

**Participant 6:** *“I think she treated me a lot, like a child. I think she's almost like a baby. And I think ... I didn't mind that that was fine.”*

**Participant 10:** *“I think that because I was young and I was very similar to the age of his daughters, I think that sometimes he saw me as his child or whatever which caused sometimes some conflict between him and I, because I'm not your child.”*

As discussed within the functions of supervision, supervisees must be empowered through education, support and administration to be able to intervene in various situations on different levels (SACSSP & DSD, 2012). While the supervision relationship is supposed to ensure this, treating a professional, registered and qualified social worker as a child is demoralising and belittles their professional capacity, regardless of their age (as will be discussed further in this theme). Crossing professional boundaries and treating a supervisee like a child is harmful supervisory practice as it does not promote or empower the supervisee to eventually become a competent, autonomous and independent practitioner who renders efficient services to clients (Engelbrecht, 2019a; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Tsui, 2005; O'Donoghue, 2003). As established in the definition of harmful supervision in chapter three, any relationship that crosses professional boundaries is harmful.

#### **4.4.3.2 Power within the supervisor relationship**

The participants of the study were asked if there are any power relations within their supervisory relationship, which the researcher probed with examples of power games. The majority of participants acknowledged the power between a supervisor and supervisee, though some participants highlighted the harmful nature of power within the supervisory relationship, as can be seen in the narratives below:

**Participant 2:** *“Because it was like I am the senior and you are the junior and I’m tell you now, it still has an effect on me until today because when someone comes to me and says I need to talk to you, then I have heart palpitations... it was really, really a power play with that.”*

**Participant 5:** *“When I started working, my supervisor wouldn’t actually sign my file if my report that I give to the children’s court was not the same as her recommendation. So I can see that because of her experience, I thought I am in contact with this client, but she thought different and she had the power.”*

**Participant 6:** *“...so she will be like, well, how would you like to address the situation, you know... I think it came from a place of trying to catch you out.”*

A plethora of authors (Ellis, Taylor, Corp, Hutman, Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Kangos, 2017) agree that supervisors need to be aware of their power and responsibility to be gatekeepers of the profession and to protect the public. Whilst power dynamics are an inherent aspect of supervision as a result of hierarchical supervision (Kluemper et al., 2018; Pieterse, 2018), it is not power in itself that is bad. The misuse or abuse of power is what causes harm, as can be seen in the narratives of participants 2 and 5. Here, harmful supervision is taking place because of an abuse of power, where the supervisor did not engage in the relationship but used his or her power to obtain their desired outcome. Supervisors are supposed to use their positional power to regulate the quality and outcomes of supervisees’ work (Chan & McAllister, 2014; Beddoe, 2017), whilst using their expert power to impart knowledge to supervisees (Beddoe, 2017). If, however, supervisees are being told to do something because “I say so” they are not learning, and harmful supervision is taking place due to the positional and expert power being abused within the supervisory relationship.

Participant 6 is a victim of power games. Whilst such power games can only occur if both parties participate (Engelbrecht, 2019a), the supervisees are particularly vulnerable to this as they are still learning and growing. By the supervisor throwing the supervisee’s question back to her in an attempt to catch her out, she is exerting her power as the dominant and experienced

party within the supervisory relationship. However, if there was no imbalance of power there would be no need for the supervisor to act as such, and supervision would be a good space for the supervisee to learn without power being in the way and causing harm to her.

#### **4.4.3.3 Generational differences**

The participants were asked if generational differences influence their supervision sessions, and what kind of generational distinctions are within supervision from their experience. The majority of participants stated that generational difference is not always the main factor, but instead listed other factors (which will be discussed further on). However, there were some participants who pinpointed the generational influences and the effects thereof in supervision, as can be seen in the narratives below.

**Participant 12:** *“Totally. I think the modern social worker or the younger social worker uses technology differently, the systems they do is different, and the way they work is different.”*

**Participant 17:** *“That's a more generational thing, that we want more fulfilment and personal growth. Whereas people from the previous generation, and I guess I can, it's safe to say that she might be, from a previous generation. She might just focus on getting the work done and like, this is the thing to do, great, like not focus on personal growth.”*

**Participant 19:** *“She's a bit older than me. Sometimes I need to assist her with certain things because she's older than me, like I'm more of a digital person.”*

Generational differences are a particularly difficult factor to classify, as there are older people keeping up with the times and advancing with the technology, along with younger people who prefer to do it the way they have been taught by older generations. As mentioned previously, none of these factors can be seen in isolation and generational differences are not an exception. The narratives above outline how generations can influence supervision, not always negatively; however, if the stereotypes, perceptions and actions go unaddressed, this can be on the harmful supervision spectrum. Participants 12 and 19 acknowledge the differences in generation with regard to technology, but participant 12 stereotypes the older generation and her supervisor included. While it is clear that the technological and other stereotypes prevail and undoubtedly influence individual opinions and their actions (MacManus & Turner, 2018), if not addressed within supervision they are harmful to the relationship, specifically when this is creating conflict.

#### **4.4.3.4 Gender differences**

Of the 20 participants, all were females being supervised by females, and they all stated that gender was not really accounted for and that it did not influence supervision. While this appeared positive to the researcher, it became apparent that not accounting for gender can also be harmful to the supervision relationship, as can be seen in the narrative below.

**Participant 6:** *“I got locked in a tik-house once with Nigerians and they wouldn’t let me out of the house, okay, and only because I had formed good relationships with the tannie on the corner by giving her rusks once a week so she could give me the gossip in the street, was I saved. Because I hate to think what type of situation, I would’ve ended up in otherwise. So when I told my supervisor I need to go into a really dangerous area, do you mind if I take someone<sup>3</sup> with me to go driving she said no, because it’s easier to replace one social worker than it is to replace two.... Like if, I think about it, like it was just ... she was, she was a bitch, and you can quote me on that one I don’t even care. But she was awful in that sense.”*

This narrative depicts the fullness of harmful supervision, where the supervisee was left in a physically dangerous situation because of her supervisor not accounting for her gender. In South Africa, it is common practise for women to be told not to walk alone, to be in groups and to stay out of certain areas; nevertheless, this social worker was sent into a dangerous area alone after requesting help from her supervisor. In chapter three, a significant part of the definition of harmful supervision was defined by factors such as micro aggressions (McNamara et al., 2017; Beddoe, 2017), acting inappropriately or with malice (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017), and any physical, sexual or verbal abuse (Beddoe, 2017). It is clear that this supervisor was acting in a harmful way on the grounds of not being gender sensitive, putting her supervisee in harm’s way and acting out of malice in an already traumatic situation. Thus, it is important for supervisors to not be blind to gender, but to acknowledge supervisees in the already challenging field of social work.

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<sup>3</sup> Removed the name to protect the identity of the participant’s colleague.

**THEME 4: ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE**

Theme	Sub-themes
Working environment	Organisational culture
	Structural issues and managerialism

Table 4.4.4 Working environment

**4.4.4. Working environment**

In this section, the participants were asked to elaborate on their working environments, specifically reflecting on their organisational culture, structural or hierarchical issues and managerialism.

**4.4.4.1 Organisational culture**

The participants were asked about their experiences with regard to the organisational culture and how that influences supervision. Some participants spoke about the above-mentioned open-door policy and how it makes them feel at home and safe to talk to their supervisor whenever they need to. Others described how organisational culture cause harm within the supervisory relationship, as can be seen in the narratives below.

**Participant 6:** “So I think the culture there was one of a lot of fear, a lot of bitchiness and I think it was a lot of chaos... So I think that was another thing, is nobody trusted the people that were in charge because you were like ... if you were in charge you would be doing your job and you're not. Because your job as a supervisor is to make sure that, I'm functioning the best I can do and you're not doing that by not even giving me the tools that I need to function.”

**Participant 7:** “We work as a team but sometimes it's not always helpful 'cause we're all in each other's portfolios. So then, in a supervision session I can end up talking about someone else's work rather than focusing on mine.”

**Participant 15:** “Because it wasn't something that the company thought of or advocated for, and it was left up to me to make my appointments so when life got busy I would skipped sometimes, unintentionally, but yeah, so it was really just up to me and when it felt like I really needed it then yeah.”

**Participant 17:** “If the rest of the office is not feeling happy with the supervisor ... can feel negative and talk to us about it. And then that might influence how we feel at that moment about

*our supervisor. So, you might have felt neutral or even positive and now this conversation makes you feel slightly negative.”*

The narratives above clearly depict how organisational culture and organisational norms influence supervision in very different yet harmful ways. Participant 6 describes an environment where she and her colleagues were not given resources or assistance by her supervisor, which caused a distrust and tension within the team and towards supervision. Participant 6 describes the opposite in terms of the tensions amongst her colleagues, as it leads them to all help each other; however, it is equally harmful as it hinders the social worker from tending to her own case discussions within supervision as the culture is too enmeshed. Participant 16, who was the only social worker at her organisation, did not have a culture of supervision within her work place and had to advocate for her organisation to send her on supervision. Because of this, she was not held accountable and attending supervision felt negative, as it was removing her from her work. Lastly, participant 17 describes how other people’s negative emotions could affect the work place. While each of these are separate examples, they depict how the organisational culture can be harmful to the supervision process. Patterson and Whincup (2017) and Munro (2011) state that supervision has become more of a two-way process, where organisational culture and management style can influence the quality of practitioners’ engagement with the people they work with. Hence, organisational culture can influence supervision in various ways and easily contributes to harmful supervision.

#### **4.4.4.2 Structural issues and managerialism**

Participants were asked to explain if structural or hierarchical issues influenced supervision, and in the following question were asked if managerialism plays a role within the supervision process. Although both questions were asked separately, the majority of participants interlinked structural issues with managerialism, as can be seen in the narratives below.

**Participant 17:** *“So I feel like in a job like this there should be more hands on supervision... She just manages us and because she's middle management, she's also the link between us on the ground level and our management... So it's not her fault it's the structure's fault.”*

Participant 17 continues by saying:

*“I think that having forced supervision once a month... you're not always ready or in the right space, and then it can become quite administrative and managerial... this is just to tick the boxes, this is just to show ... look there was supervision, look at all the little boxes she filled her things out in. I checked everything ... cool.”*



**Participant 6:** *“The lack of structure really influenced your supervision and how much supervision you actually got.”*

Participant 6 subsequently noted that when she did receive supervision, it was:

*“like ticking boxes and it was like how many cases have you closed, how many cases do you have open, what have you done for these cases.”*

It is therefore apparent that when the structure of the organisation is not correct, it is more likely for managerial supervision to take place where the administrative boxes are just being checked and the supervisee is merely moving along. As Engelbrecht (2019a) describes and as can be seen in narrative 17, due to social work supervisors being middle-level managers in South Africa they play a crucial role in influencing the vertical power and authority through their access to the management hierarchy (Engelbrecht, 2019a). This in turn can make them susceptible to only being managerial, as the organisational structures in South Africa are often run that way. It is however still important to acknowledge that the main focus of social work is to assist and help clients, whilst that of a business is to make profit. When these lines are crossed managerialism sets in, where managers are concerned with the power and influence of the organisation rather than meeting the needs of the service users (Enteman, 1993; Lambly, 2010; Rogowski, 2011). Due to organisational and hierarchical structures leaning more towards supervisors also being managers, it is prevalent that organisational structures influence managerialism and supervision as a whole. This form of supervision is certainly classified as harmful supervision, as can be seen in the additional narratives below:

**Participant 7:** *“So I think sometimes it can be harmful when it's mainly just like an administrative thing. So you're just, like going through, like reports or deadlines.”*

**Participant 12:** *“I think because of the reality of the work I do, I think it is just, have we done it, yes, tick okay great. I don't think it's getting the attention that it should get.”*

Trevithick (2014) explains that managerialism fails to recognise the importance of the emotional life of human beings as well as the importance of relationships, and that this failure hinders the quality and effectiveness of work and in turn supervision. As mentioned before in the section on the functions of supervision, it is imperative to look at supervision holistically. However, having a managerial approach is the opposite of that, yet this is still happening in practise today and should be seen as harmful.



**THEME 5: THE HARMFULNESS OR HELPFULNESS OF SUPERVISION**

Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
Harmfulness or helpfulness of supervision	Is supervision harmful or helpful?	Personal experience
		General perceptions of supervision
	Other factors contributing to harmful supervision	

Table 4.4.5 The harmfulness or helpfulness of supervision

**4.4.5 The harmfulness or helpfulness of supervision**

In this section, participants were asked to elaborate if supervision was harmful or helpful. Participants were specifically asked to reflect on their personal experience and also their general perceptions of supervision, including those of other partitions in social work.

**4.4.5.1 Is supervision harmful or helpful?**

Initially, participants were asked if their supervision was harmful or helpful before any of the other factors were discussed. Whilst the majority did not think it was harmful they did mention areas of improvement, which can be seen in the other themes as harmful. Thereafter, participants were asked if they perceive supervision as a whole to be harmful or helpful, and they easily explained why others might be receiving harmful supervision from their perspective. The following categories will divulge the different narratives.

***4.4.5.1.1 Personal experiences***

The majority of participants stated that they think their supervision is helpful and not harmful; however, participants initially also struggled to use the word harmful to describe supervision or any of its practises. As can be seen below, the narratives present that they perceive their supervision as helpful.

**Participant 1:** *“It’s not the full spectrum but it isn’t harmful I don’t think.”*

**Participant 5:** *“I feel it’s helpful but you can be more helpful.”*

**Participant 7:** *“I’d say it’s helpful because it, like offers a supportive function and it’s somewhat ... it provides guidance in my caseload.”*

**Participant 11:** *“It was helpful, a lot of the time I experienced helpful supervision.”*

Although most participants did not perceive their supervision to be harmful, these same participants also elaborated on harmful supervision practises that they do receive. This can be seen in the previous themes, where they extrapolated harmful supervision practises which were defined in chapter three, as can be seen in the themes above and the narratives below:

**Participant 1:** *“Well consultation with our supervisor depends on her... personality, and maybe her position also as CEO so she will maybe focus more on... is work being done. More are you coping with your tasks, not to put a bad light on her but there is not a lot of talk about wellness or am I coping.”*

**Participant 5:** *“...but the support can be more, it's the one that lacks the personal support.”*

**Participant 7:** *“I think sometimes it can be harmful when it's mainly just like an administrative thing. So you're just, like going through, like reports or deadlines.”*

**Participant 11:** *“There were times when I felt threatened and I felt there wasn't enough support from the supervisor or for the organisation as a whole.”*

For each narrative which stated that supervision is helpful, the researcher had already pointed out a harmful component of their supervision in the previous themes. Harmful supervision, as defined in chapter three is supervision that is inadequate, characterised by any behaviour or action that does not uphold the ethical values and standards of the Supervision Framework as outlined by the Department of Social Development (DSD & SACSSP, 2012). While it is clear throughout chapter four that harmful supervision is taking place, it can be noted in these narratives that supervisees are not able to identify it or will not identify it. This could be due to the individualised nature of supervision practise and the lack of accountability, security, balances and checks to regulate supervisory practises (Reiser & Milner, 2017; McNamara et al., 2017) for the supervisee to identify when receiving harmful supervision. Alternatively, this could be due to supervisees not identifying the actions as harmful (Ammirati & Kaslow, 2017) as they do not understand what harmful supervision is.

#### **4.4.5.1.2 General perceptions of supervision**

Contradictory to what most participants stated about supervision being helpful to them, when asked about general perceptions of supervision practise for colleagues and social workers as a whole, the participants had no problem stating how harmful they think the practise can be, as can be seen in the narratives below:

**Participant 3:** *“I think there is a lack, there are so many people who don't have regular supervision, and their supervisors show them off if they need help... and there are things that are harmful.”*

**Participant 4:** *“I think it is harmful because you can't in 15 minutes offload and discuss all your work and get support, it's a bit short.”*

**Participant 7:** *“If something is not done well, or done properly, then it's not good... then it is harmful.”*

**Participant 9:** *“So I think that can be harmful. And I've seen it with colleagues and staff where they've had that as well and it's caused a lot of issues for them.”*

Evidently, social work practitioners do see the harmful nature of supervision and where it is lacking. However, it is clear that the participants disclose these facts more freely when referring to someone else who is receiving harmful supervision than when it is themselves. It may therefore be difficult for supervisees who receive harmful supervision to recognise this deteriorating practise, trust their ability to detect it, and feel comfortable reporting it (McNamara et al., 2017). This lack of understanding and confidence in reporting keeps harmful supervision under the radar and allows this practise to fester.

Although supervisees are not able to identify harmful supervision clearly for themselves and view supervision as more helpful than harmful, it is evident in the previous themes that harm is taking place and leaving supervisees unaware of the long-term effects on themselves and their practises.

#### **4.4.5.2 Other factors**

Finally, the participants were asked if they have any additional factors which they think would contribute to harmful supervision, and the following narratives came to light:

**Participant 9:** *“The matching of supervisors. Sometimes you're forced to have a supervisor that may be a personality clash.”*

**Participant 18:** *“Maybe our personalities. Yeah, because yeah, we are three intake workers and all three of us are straightforward. So for instance, if I go to the one person in the morning and I will see, okay, her face is not right then I'd rather leave it, come back later.”*

**Participant 11:** *“I think culturally at my first job I was the only coloured social worker and everyone else was white including my supervisor and I felt my colour.”*

**Participant 12:** *“I think if it feels rushed or if the supervisee feels they don't have your attention in that session..., I think that can be hurtful or damaging because that might hinder them from saying something else that they might want.”*

As mentioned in chapter three, new factors could be identified in the field that are not always prevalent in research and the above-mentioned narratives depict this. Participant 9 and participant 18 both reflect on personalities and the clashing thereof within the supervisory relationship and how this can influence supervision, potentially causing harmful supervision. Dettlaff (2005) conducted a study on student placements and found that 50% of students in these placements described this conflict between supervisors and supervisees as the result of personality differences. It was also found that personality conflicts were a primary reason for failure in field placements. Thus, in order to establish a positive and productive supervisory relationship, supervisors must be aware of their own personality style and how this style may affect others and relationship development in order to curb harmful supervision practises.

Participant 11 stated that she could “feel” she was a different race to the other people who worked at her organisation. Such a feeling is not helpful to the supervisory relationship and most certainly hindered her from relating and feeling comfortable with her supervisor. Organisations have to ensure that they create an inclusive environment for supervisees and clients alike. Additionally, another factor that could contribute to a supervisee not being comfortable within the organisation or supervision session would be if the supervisor was not attentive. This could lead to the supervisee not feeling important and result in more harm in the supervisory relationship than good. It is therefore important that the supervisory relationship is built on trust, mutual respect and understanding of personalities.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to address the third objective of the study, i.e. to investigate the perceptions and experiences of social workers about their observations of the factors which are contributing to harmful supervision of social workers. This chapter commenced by analysing the research methodology used throughout the research. The chapter also explored the biographical information of the participants including their experience, sector of social work and whether they are receiving supervision or not. Lastly, the five themes, subthemes and categories were established and examined through the narratives of the participants and literature. These themes included: the supervision processes, functions of supervision, relationship with the supervisor,

the working environment and the harmfulness or helpfulness of supervision. The next chapter will present appropriate conclusions and recommendations drawn from the empirical study.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the study was to identify potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers and to gain an understanding on how these factors manifest toward harmful supervision. In South Africa, the Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) guides supervision practises, but there is a lack of social work knowledge and literature identifying factors that contribute to harmful supervision practises. This lack of literature on harmful supervision in social work notwithstanding, other professions including business and psychology (Reiser & Milne, 2017; Trepper, 2000) lay the foundation for exploring this detrimental form of supervision in social work along with its potential contributing factors and consequences.

It was due to this lack of literature that the researcher aimed to identify these factors in a South African context by understanding the current research regarding supervision. The researcher then conceptualised harmful supervision of social workers based on literature from other countries and professions, as only then could the researcher identify factors contributing to harmful supervision by drawing on the experiences of South African social workers who have been exposed to supervision. After these harmful factors were identified through data analysis and displayed in chapter four, the final conclusions and recommendations could be made.

This chapter serves to make conclusions and recommendations to supervisors and management systems of public and private social work organisations on how to prevent harmful supervision practises within social work, in order for supervision to fulfil its intended role and do no harm.

#### **5.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings during the empirical study in chapter four, the researcher will make conclusions and recommendations for going forward. The conclusions will be based on the themes and sub-themes established in chapter four and will highlight the key findings of each section. Thereafter, the researcher will make recommendations to rectify or assist in bringing change to harmful supervisory practises.

##### **5.2.1 Working environment**

Social work is a broad field and practise and each sector has different stressors, time constraints and supervision strategies. The participants of the study came from six different sectors,

namely: statutory work, child and youth care centres, disabilities, therapy with children, and medical and rehabilitation centres. Some participants came from NGOs and others from government institutions, though it is to be expected that the participants would come from similar fields due to snowball sampling and the referral process. The majority of the participants work with children, whether in child and youth care centres, statutory services, play therapy or the disability sector. The working environment undoubtedly influences the frequency, type and style of supervision that the social workers receive. It was clear from the study that social workers who are not in statutory services believe that statutory workers require more assistance due to the stressful nature of their jobs. However, statutory workers do not feel that there is time for supervision with their high caseloads and see their supervisors as people who need to sign off on their case files, rather than as educators and supporters. While it is noticeable that social workers see the need for support, the working environment and stressors of the job influence the quality of supervision and can certainly contribute to harmful supervision.

### **5.2.2 Structured supervision**

Most of the participants in the study agreed that they are receiving supervision, however this question was posed before the participants were asked about the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision. While harmful supervision should not be defined as supervision per se, most participants were not aware that various aspects of their supervision practise are in fact potentially harmful. Some of the other participants were also receiving consultation and a few were not currently receiving any supervision at all. This question – whether social workers are receiving supervision – was asked in order to establish if social workers are indeed receiving their mandated supervision which is due to them. The question was important to the study as the participants could draw on their current experience as well as past experiences. Those who are not currently receiving supervision were asked to draw on previous experiences. In conclusion, it became clear that not all social workers are receiving supervision per se to start with, while others are not receiving the all-encompassing supervision that is mandated. Moreover, some supervisees are receiving consultation, which is determined by the supervision contract and performance appraisal after the goals and outcomes of supervision in the initial contract are achieved, before the supervisees have even been practising for a year. From this, it can be concluded that they should not be on consultation but rather receiving supervision to ensure professional development and support. Thus, harmful supervision is occurring because

supervisees are not receiving supervision at all and are receiving consultation when they have not achieved the goals of their initial supervision contract.

## **Recommendations**

- Statutory organisations, generalised organisations and specialised fields of social services should implement safeguards such as “office days” or have colleagues assist with fieldwork on predetermined days to ensure that supervision is taking place despite high caseloads. Organisations should additionally ensure that supervision takes place regularly by stipulating the structure and frequency of supervision in the organisational policies.
- Additionally, the Department of Social Development should explicitly state in its policies how they will ensure that supervision takes place according to their norms, standards and frameworks, and ensure that stringent mechanisms are put in place for organisations not complying with supervision standards and norms.

### **5.2.3 Professionalism as a factor**

Being a professional is a crucial part of the supervisory relationship. Professionalism spans from behavior to meeting the requirements of supervision, as set out by the Supervision Framework (SACSSP & DSD, 2012). When participants were asked about the frequency of supervision, the consensus was that supervision sessions occur monthly, but can often be canceled due to court dates or other obligations. The majority of participants referred positively to the open-door policy that assists them in this regard when the required supervision does not take place. However, while open door policies are good for organisational culture, this should not replace routine and structured supervision. Due to the quick and simple nature of such open-door pop ins, this type of meeting does not fulfil the triad of functions required by structured supervision and thus cannot be called supervision. On the contrary, “on the run”, non-structured supervision may be regarded as harmful supervision, as no specific supervision process is followed and no associated tasks are executed.

Additionally, being prepared and having planned for supervision is also part of the professional process. Thus, a supervisory agenda is required for both parties to engage in the supervisory relationship, yet few of the participants had official agendas for their supervision sessions. As a consequence, it is evident in the narratives that many goals, functions and roles of supervision are not being fulfilled. When there is no personal development assessment, personal development plan and contract as part of the supervision process, as well as agendas based on



the personal development plan for supervision, there is space for error and non-compliance to the standard of supervision, thus resulting in harmful supervision. Moreover, reporting on the supervision sessions in a professional format such as a progress report is imperative to the professionalism of the supervisory relationship. In so doing, this also assists in the regulating process of supervision to ensure that supervision is taking place and that harmful practices are not occurring within supervision. However, the participants felt that documenting personal matters that influence practice is no longer confidential, as these are being read by the regulatory bodies which hinders the supervision process. Other participants felt that reporting on supervision is a waste of time and is only being done to please the regulatory bodies. Ultimately, supervision agendas and reports are in place for regulation and accountability, as without these professional standards supervisees would be open to harmful supervision. Similarly, if these professional actions are not being fulfilled it constitutes harmful supervision.

Another important factor that contributes to professional development is the supervision contract. This should be signed at the beginning of the supervisory relationship and should state the goals, functions and roles of the parties within this relationship. The majority of the participants had supervision contracts, but admitted that they only have them because the Department of Social Development requires them to. Furthermore, participants have admitted to not even reading it and merely signing it because they know they have to. This is alarming, as it detracts from the professional state of the supervisory contract and indicates that the contract does not have professional development goals, which should be measured within the supervision sessions and seen as a guideline throughout the supervisory relationship. If, however, there are no supervisory goals to be obtained, supervision will become stagnant and practitioners will never become autonomous. Thus, neglecting the supervision contract and professional development goals equates to harmful supervision practice.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Department of Social Development and the SACSSP should make the definition of harmful supervision known and accessible to students and practitioner alike. This is to ensure that supervisees are aware that “on the run” supervision and open-door policy supervision are more harmful than helpful over time and should be known as methods of harmful supervision.
- The Department of Social Development and the SACSSP should make available a recommended guideline of a supervision agenda in the Supervision Framework for

supervisors and supervisees. This will ensure that the basics of supervision are planned for and covered in each session by using the structured supervision agenda as a guideline.

- The Department of Social Development should agree to sign a confidentiality agreement when auditing supervision contracts, reports and sessions.

#### **5.2.4 Functions of supervision**

The functions of supervision are crucial to the development of the supervisees to aid them in supporting, educating and assisting with administrative tasks. This commences with administration, which has a tendency to become the predominant function of social work supervision. However, if administration is over- or under-prioritised it is harmful to the supervisory relationship. The administrative function is in place to ensure effective and appropriate implementation of agency policies and procedures through tasks such as checking on reports, reviewing and evaluating work, coordinating work, performance evaluations and communicating. One of the participants did not have her supervisor assisting and guiding her with the administrative tasks regarding her daily work. This is classified as harmful supervision, because it lacks a function of supervision and thus constitutes inadequate supervision practise. Likewise, only focusing on the administrative function, as experienced by many of the participants is also harmful, as this detracts from the other equally important functions of supervision. Supervision that is inadequate and does not encompass all three functions of supervision is more harmful than helpful, but also very common.

Due to the taxing nature of social work practice, support is crucial to the supervisee to ensure that the practitioner is rendering effective services to the client. In this study, supervisees emphasised how important support is to them and how it helps them to grow. However, a few participants noted that they were not receiving support and that the support they were receiving was not genuine, but rather entailed going through the motions of fulfilling the functions. Consequences of this harmful practice may lead to high turnover rates, which has negative effects on the supervisees, the organisations and the service users.

Finally, there is the education function of supervision, which has the primary goal of improving knowledge and skills of the supervisee in order for them to be empowered to execute their duties well. While a few participants stated that this function is being fulfilled through outsourced training, the supervision framework clearly extrapolates that outsourced training should be over and above the education and training that is being conducted within supervision.

Other participants noted that training is not happening at all. Education is important for growth of practitioners, for without growth there will be a slow but steady decrease in practise as society is changing and supervisees are required to remain abreast with these changes. To receive no education within supervision is inadequate and thus harmful supervision, as this may have harmful consequences to service users as well.

### **Recommendations:**

- Any social work organisation employing social workers should ensure that regular and structured supervision is available to these workers. Furthermore, the supervisors should at least have attended accredited training to be able to employ administration, education and support as functions of supervision. The SACSSP and DSD should take the lead to ensure the development of their supervision frameworks, policies and training manuals and that supervisors should have sufficient training before they are employed as supervisors in any organisation.

### **5.2.5 Relationship with supervisor**

A healthy supervision relationship is crucial to the supervision process. The professional relationship includes interaction, respect and a sense of professionalism, as previously discussed. While most of the participants stated that they have a good relationship with their supervisors, others depicted over-friendly and weak professional boundaries, including going away with their supervisor for a weekend and spending time with one another in social settings. When professional boundaries are crossed and the supervisory relationship extends into a friendship, it opens many doors for harmful supervision practice to take place; for example, using supervision to discuss personal plans, and even having sexual relations with one's supervisor. This practice is harmful and detracts from the main purposes and functions of supervision. On the other hand, if the relationship is not based on mutual respect in a professional capacity the supervision is harmful, as it may belittle the supervisee and demoralise their ability to perform as a professional, causing harm not only to the client system but also to the profession.

Within the supervisory relationship, it is inevitable that power plays a role, due to the nature of a more experienced social worker relaying knowledge and skill to another social worker. Whilst power in itself is not inherently bad, the misuse of power within the supervisory relationship is harmful. Misusing power does not empower the supervisee but makes them feel insignificant, as can be seen by the participants' narratives. Power games take place when both

parties participate, yet it is still the responsibility of the supervisor with the most power to not misuse it and cause harm to the supervision relationship.

A generational difference is also to be anticipated, as the supervisors are expected to be more experienced than supervisees. While generational differences often link in with other factors such as personality, era, gender and nationality, it is still evident that generational differences play a role in supervision. The narratives tell the story of how supervisors require assistance with new technological advancements. Whilst it is acceptable to seek help, it is important that supervisors and supervisees alike remain abreast with technological advancements as well as social work practice. If supervisors or supervisees refuse to learn new skills based on their generation, supervision will stagnate and be harmful as it will not be fulfilling its functions and might not be relevant anymore.

Lastly, the gender of the supervisee and supervisor plays a role within the supervisory relationship. While there are obvious factors such as discriminating against someone due to their gender, the other side to the coin is not taking gender into account. While not accounting for gender may appear professional and harmless, not being aware of the supervisees' gender and capacity within their gender leaves them vulnerable to harm and discounts for their abilities, as the narrative pertaining to this factor suggests, which may physically endanger them. Any physical harm done to, or experienced by a supervisee at the neglect of their supervisor is harmful to supervision and to the practitioner's professional identity.

### **Recommendations:**

- In the same way that supervisees' performances are evaluated annually, a summative evaluation of supervisors by supervisees should also be expected by each organisation employing social workers. This should be incorporated in the supervision frameworks of the DSD and the SACSSP in order to curb harmful supervision. By acknowledging these factors, there will be less room for ignorance and harmful practice.

### **5.2.6 Working environment**

Organisational culture can influence supervision tremendously. If supervision is not prioritised at an organisation as a whole, it is almost self-explanatory that the supervision will be more harmful than helpful. In the same vein, if the organisational culture is filled with tension and arguments this too will filter into supervision. It is imperative that the supervisor at an organisation assist in organisational matters to ensure that they do not cause harm within the supervisory relationship. Within the South African setting, supervisors are at a middle

management level and hence have the capacity to assist and deal with organisational issues. If, however this is not addressed, it should be regarded as harmful supervision, even if it is not taking place within the supervision sessions.

Just as power and organisational issues influence supervision of social workers, so do structural issues and managerialism. The study has shown that if the structure of the organisation is not founded upon mutual respect it is more likely for managerial supervision to take place, where the administrative boxes are just being checked and the supervisee then continuing with his or her daily tasks. This can be curbed by supervisors understanding the importance of supervision and prioritising it. However, if supervisors do not understand the essence of supervision (such as structured and reflective supervision sessions, based on a personal development plan), it is likely to become a routine of simply checking the boxes to indicate that it has been done, as opposed to fulfilling its intended function. This form of supervision tends to be managerial and is more harmful than helpful.

### **Recommendations:**

- Organisations should structure their management systems to such an extent that certain managers focus solely on management tasks and that supervisors do what they are supposed to do – i.e. focus on supervision. This will ensure that the time and posts of supervisors are structured in such a manner that will enable them to focus on supervision, and not just as a “by-product” of their management.
- Organisations should ensure that their supervisors are registered with the SACSSP as a specialist in supervision, with the implication that they have to meet the requirements of this field of specialisation.

### **5.2.7 The helpfulness or harmfulness of supervision**

The participants of the study were unable to identify harmful supervision practices for themselves. In addition, they were skeptical to use the word harmful, and used other words or phrases such as “it could be more helpful” and “most of the time it was helpful”. While it is uncertain why participants acted in this way, it can be speculated that it is due to the individualised nature of supervision practise and the lack of accountability, security, balances and checks to regulate supervisory practises. Alternatively, it could be because supervisees do not know what harmful supervision is, or cannot acknowledge how potentially harmful their supervision can be. Nevertheless, all participants gave descriptions of incidences and thus factors that could potentially be harmful in their supervision.

However, when supervisees were asked about supervision in general, they freely pointed out how harmful supervision can be to other practitioners or drew on experiences they have been witness to. Whilst this might be due to the lack of ownership for the consequences that may follow, due to it not being the supervisees who are receiving the harmful supervision, it is nonetheless a harmful practice and should be stopped immediately.

### **Recommendations:**

- In order to curb harmful supervision, the SACSSP should consider employing an ombudsperson who will specifically investigate harmful supervision practices in social work – and that social workers, supervisors and organisations should be made aware of this system.
- Additionally, educating supervisees about harmful practice should be added to the curricula of undergraduates.
- The definition of harmful supervision should also be made available in the Supervision Framework for the social work profession.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research study was aimed at identifying factors that may be contributing to harmful supervision of social workers based on their experience and perceptions. In order to establish these factors, the study attempted to understand supervision as a whole and conceptualised harmful supervision within the framework of its practice as extrapolated by existing literature. Findings from the empirical research indicated that there are various factors which contribute to harmful supervision of social workers, and that harmful practice is prevalent within South Africa. With this in mind, it is imperative that the following areas be further explored:

- A quantitative study should be conducted in order to establish the significance of harmful supervision practices on the social work profession.
- A survey to be carried out to identify whether organisations deem it possible to have managers and supervisors as separate functioning roles in order to improve the quality of supervision.
- This research should be replicated in other provinces in order to generalise the results, as all participants were from the Western Cape.

- A survey should be conducted to establish if supervisors feel equipped with sufficient training to supervise supervisees.
- A more in-depth study should be carried out, including more male participants to see if the results will vary based on gender, as all participants in this study were female.

#### **5.4 KEY FINDINGS AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS**

This study was aimed at identifying the factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers. Due to the theoretical framework and empirical study, the researcher was able to identify such factors that are taking place in the practice of social workers in South Africa. The need for the study was based on the lack of abreast literature within the social work profession in South Africa that pertains to harmful supervision.

The researcher came to the conclusion through findings generated from a purposive, qualitative, exploratory study by means of individual interviews with 20 social workers that supervision in many instances may become a mere “tick-boxing exercise”, is crisis driven and “on the run”, and is in many instances reduced to a mere compliance checking. Additionally, that supervision is no longer reaching its intended functions and that the checks and balances in place are falling away as they are being used simply as a formality. Some participants experience minimum support and feel at risk and vulnerable in the volatile field of social work.

If supervision was returned to its all-encompassing nature, supervisors and supervisees alike would reap the benefits of its practise. While time constraints and lack of training for supervisors are valid points as to why supervision is not happening correctly, it is not an excuse for this type of malpractice, which should be treated as a serious offence. To conclude, supervision is crucial in social work practise, but is more harmful than helpful when not being executed properly.

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## ANNEXURE 1



### **Informed consent for participants**

#### **Consent for social workers to participate in the research on the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers.**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Thea T Wynne from the Department of Social Work at Stellenbosch University. The results will contribute to the abovementioned thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are Social Worker with minimum 1 year of experience and are deemed eligible to participate in the study. You will take part in this research in your personal professional capacity therefore not representing your organisation.

#### **1. Purpose of study**

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers, through conceptualizing the perspectives of social workers.

If you volunteer to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Be available for the conducting of an interview at a convenient time determined and agreed upon by you and the researcher.
- Should you require any further information about the research you can contact the researcher via email at [18485715@sun.ac.za](mailto:18485715@sun.ac.za).

#### **2. Potential risks and discomforts**

If there is any discomfort for you as a participant, counselling services will be provided to you. This is accessible by contacting Adrienne (0741274505) a registered social worker. All interviews are regarded as confidential therefore no personal details of participants will be included in the research.

### **3. Confidentiality**

Interviews will be conducted in private and the researcher will not record any personal identifying information of the participants. Data collected from participants will be stored for 5 years on a password protected computer and hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home.

### **4. Participation and withdrawal**

The participant's involvement in this study is completely voluntary. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from the research study if the circumstances warrant doing so.

### **5. Identification of investigators**

Should there be need to further information regarding the research study, you may contact the researcher through telephone 0784599997 or via email at 18485715@sun.ac.za. If you have any questions or concerns about the research study, feel free to contact the supervisor, Prof L. Engelbrecht, Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University via email at Ike@sun.ac.za or by telephone 0210802073.

### **6. Payment for participation**

The cost of the research will be carried by the researcher and no costs will be expected from the participant. Participants will not receive remuneration from the researcher for their participation in the research study.

### **Signature of research participant**

The information above was described to me by Thea T Wynne. I ..... (name of participant) was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. I have been given copy of this form.

---

Full name of participant

---

Signature of participant

**Signature of investigator**

I declare that I explained the above information given in this document to ..... (participant name). He/she was given sufficient opportunity to ask any questions.

---

Signature of investigator

## ANNEXURE 2

### Interview schedule

For the research of: potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers.

#### A. Opening

Introduce myself and thank the participant for making the time to see me.

State that I am from the University of Stellenbosch, to do the interview (refer back to the email which says this too) for my master research thesis. About the potentially harmful factors which contribute to harmful supervision in social work.

The interview will be structured with two types of questions the first being biographical and the second being themed questions. The first category is factual and the second is open to opinion and interpretation.

Will you please read and sign this consent form, I wish to just remind you again that you are welcome to pull out of the research at any point without consequence. Also, if you feel the need for counselling after this interview, you can find the counsellors number attached.

Please be sure to answer questions in your experience or that of others (this will be reminded throughout the interview)

#### B. Biographical information and opening question

1. How many years of experience do you have as a social worker?

2. Describe your working environment

*Probe: Do you work for an NGO or the government? Do you work with adults or children? Do you do generalist social work, work in an institution or specialist field (explain)? Type of work (mostly child protection, case work, group work, community work)?*

3 Tell me about your supervision context

*Probe: Do you have an allocated supervisor? What is her/his biographical profile (gender, experience, supervision training etc.), frequency of supervision, what happens in supervision, what records of this are kept, do you have a supervision contract and goals and plan for supervision and professional development? Is there enough support to deal with your caseload and emotional stress from your job? (Alternatively ask: walk me through a basic supervision session- this will determine what functions supervision is fulfilling)*

4. Do you think YOUR supervision is harmful or helpful?

*Probe: why or why not; If necessary, use probe words from the themed questions; and/or cluster participant narrative in the themed questions*



### C. Themed questions

These may be answered whichever way you feel fit.

1. How do you experience **YOUR** relationship with your supervisor?

*Probe: give an example of how you interact (are you scared or intimidated). Do you respect, would you see them outside of the office and for what? Is there signs of professionalism? Does your supervisor consider your gender within supervision and practise (for example can't drive into an area because you are female). List some power games examples as questions. How does your age gap (generational difference) influence supervision (This will touch on boundaries, generations, gender as well as hierarchy)*

1.2 Do you regard this as a potential factor contributing to harmful supervision of social workers? *motivate*

2. How do you experience the harmfulness/helpfulness of your organisation's organisational culture and the impact thereof on **YOUR** supervision?

*Probe: is there a willingness to help, can you utilise resources? Do you think you are accepted within your full cultural, racial and professional capacity in supervision? Is **office politics** affecting you in the supervision you receive?*

2.1 Do you regard this as a potential factor contributing to harmful supervision of social workers? *motivate*

3. What is your perception of the harmfulness/helpfulness of gender differences and inequality (specifically **POWER** differences) in **YOUR** supervision?

*Probe: what kind of differences, also does your supervisor come from a different generation, how does that influence you?*

3.1 Do you regard this as a potential factor contributing to harmful supervision of social workers? *motivate*

4. What is your perception of the harmfulness/helpfulness of structural and organisational issues in social work supervision in **YOUR** supervision?

*Probe: how participants perceive structural issues (lack of resources;) probe into questions on neoliberal tenants such as: are you needing to meet targets or have a business model of management; is supervision only focused on management, thus chiefly managerial?*

4.1 Do you regard this as a potential factor contributing to harmful supervision of social workers? *motivate*

5. What is your perception of the harmfulness/helpfulness of supervision functions (support, education and administration) in **YOUR** supervision?

*Probe: Do you learn in supervision? Is all your admin accounted for? Do you feel supported as a practitioner?*

- 5.1 Do you regard this as a potential factor contributing to harmful supervision of social workers? *motivate*

6. What is your perception of the harmfulness/helpfulness of ethical issues in **YOUR** supervision?

*Probe: Do ethical issues such as regular supervision and supervision by a social worker influence supervision and how? Can you recall unethical conduct of your supervisor which may be harmful to you?*

- 6.1 Do you regard this as a potential factor contributing to harmful supervision of social workers? *motivate*

7. Are there any other factors that you may experience in **YOUR** supervision that may contribute to harmful supervision?

*Probe: such as different institutions of education, supervision training*

8. Do you think supervision in general (of social workers in general) is more harmful or helpful? Why (motivate specifically)

*\*italics will be used for probing if the participant does not understand the question*

#### **D. Closing**

Thank the participant for their time remind them about the counselling service.

Say goodbye.

## ANNEXURE 3

### Ethical approval



#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL

#### REC Humanities New Application Form

15 January 2019

Project number: 7388

Project Title: Potential factors contributing to harmful supervision of social workers

Dear Miss Thea Roodman

Your response to stipulations submitted on 13 November 2018 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities.

Please note the following for your approved submission:

**Ethics approval period:**

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
7 November 2018	6 November 2019

#### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

**If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.**

Please use your SU project number (7388) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

#### **FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD**

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

#### **Included Documents:**

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Informed Consent Form	consent	28/05/2018	
Data collection tool	Themes	12/06/2018	
Default	ROBINSON agreement	04/10/2018	
Default	budget	09/10/2018	1
Research Protocol Proposal	Proposal including changes highlighted	09/10/2018	4
Default	consent	13/11/2018	3
Default	DESC_REC_RESPONSE LETTER (1)	13/11/2018	2

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at [cgraham@sun.ac.za](mailto:cgraham@sun.ac.za).

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham